

# *Permanent Revolution*

# 2

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(an historical excavation)**

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# Reactions to the Chile catastrophe

by bas hardy

"What do the exploiters do when their own institutions no longer guarantee their domination? How do they react when the mechanisms historically depended on to maintain their domination fail them? They simply go ahead and destroy them." (Fidel Castro, farewell speech in Santiago Stadium, 2nd December 1971.)

The coup which drowned the popular front government of Salvador Allende in blood was the culmination of a scenario all too familiar in the history of working class struggle. The actors in the tragedy were different and the respective maturity and immaturity of the social forces involved in the conflict gave uniqueness to events. But the overriding notion around which the whole drama revolved — that it was possible to establish socialism without smashing the existing bourgeois state — was yet again sadly disproven. Those who encouraged themselves and others to blindly follow the "Chilean Road" have heroically but needlessly fallen victims to the terror unleashed by the Chilean ruling classes in alliance with United States imperialism.

The more philistine among bourgeois commentators generally see revolutions or coups in Latin America as examples of 'Latin' incapability to govern in a 'civilised', 'western' manner. The term 'Machismo' ('hot-bloodedness') is often employed by these 'experts' to 'explain social instability'. Yet Chile, the exceptionally constitutional regime on a continent of caudillos, did not regress to the Latin American 'norm' on September 11th 1973. The pride which the Chilean bourgeoisie felt for its own constitutional system implied that this system had **avoided** the chronic social and political instability suffered by Chile's neighbours for decades. A tradition of political democracy which had served the Chilean bourgeoisie far longer than some of its western European counterparts was not junked overnight without consideration of the consequences. The coup was not the outcome of a power struggle between the rulers, but the response of the rulers collectively to a challenge which threatened the social foundations of the constitutional system. 'Good democrats', such as Frei, regretfully conceded their congressional comforts. The universal answer of **any bourgeoisie** to the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses could only be military dictatorship or fascism.

What made Chile an exception in Latin America? Firstly, Chile lacked for many years one single imperialism which dominated the bourgeoisie as a whole. US and British imperialism were represented by different fractions of the ruling class. The large amount of independence with respect to imperialism was also reinforced by the early dominance of the bourgeoisie over the mining sector.

Another important factor was that the early acceptance of the bourgeoisie into the ranks of the older property-owning classes, combined with regional differences which also cut across class line, provided not only a stability which excluded serious divisions between comprador bourgeoisie and landowners, but **incorporated the national bourgeoisie into the political-power framework as well.**

The absence of working class politics on the national level until the 1930s contrasted sharply with the national bourgeoisie's position. Because the majority of the proletariat was engaged in mining, they were separated not only by the vast distances between the mining centres in the north and south of the country, but were also away from the big cities and the capital. Consequently, struggles tended to assume purely localised dimensions. Even in the late sixties, while the working class parties were among the strongest in Latin America (the PCCh — Communist Party — was larger than the Cuban CP) the trade union organisation in Chile represented only 15% of the entire labour force.<sup>1</sup>

Before the 1900s the Chilean Congress was, like the British Parliament, the exclusive preserve of rival bourgeois parties. Recabarren, an early leader of the Chilean labour movement and founder of the PCCh, argued (quite rightly) for the right of the working class to send its own representatives to Congress. However, he did so on the basis that if the working class was not represented "...brothers in a single nation would plunge into an abyss of blood." The South American Bureau of the Comintern was later to criticise the 'legacy' of Recabarren who had founded the party "...as in structure a party of the social reformist type, and [in] its formation as a 'federation' of purely electoral organisations."<sup>2</sup>

Criticism of Recabarren was made during Stalinism's 'third period', and a year or so later the old reformist practices of the PCCh were resumed. Yet while the PCCh was following the new dictat of Moscow, a new party was formed to continue the tradition of Recabarren which the PCCh had momentarily abandoned.

The Chilean Socialist Party was founded a year after the failure of Marmaduke Grove's 'socialist republic', established in 1932 by 'left wing' putschist army officers. Many founders of the PS, Salvador Allende included, had supported Grove's putsch, and it was reaction to the failure of putschist methods which contributed greatly to the SP's deep-seated electoralism.

Despite a close similarity between the SP and PCCh, the two parties continued to maintain separate organisational identities throughout their existence. The PS wanted to avoid the organisational monolithism of the PCCh as well as the stigma the latter acquired through its association with the Comintern and Stalinist barbarism.

But there was also a certain chauvinistic element in the PS's refusal to commit itself internationally. The two parties it did associate with, Accion Democratica in Venezuela and APRA in Peru, highlighted a typically centrist weakness for international connections, particularly since these two groups became spokesmen for US imperialism eventually.

In the PS's internal life, the electoralist-orientated leadership was the strongest component in an otherwise diffuse party, always managing to triumph over instinctive feelings in the rank-and-file that a socialist revolution required something more than a victory at the polling stations. Allende's nomination as Popular Unity candidate in 1970 was won by the support he received from the PCCh, despite opposition from the majority of the PS who wanted to stand a more militant candidate. Throughout the three years of Popular Unity, Allende and the PCCh were to continue this relationship against the groundswell of opposition within the PS ranks.

For many years Stalinist strategy in Latin America was governed with reference to the "stages theory". Each country possessed 'dual' economies and sets of social relations corresponding to them. The 'reactionary-feudal sector'

based in the countryside had first to be defeated by the 'national-bourgeois sector' in the industrial centres before socialism could be contemplated. The schema ignored the extent to which the feudal agricultural set-up was interconnected rather than divorced from national and international capitalism. The need to increase super-exploitation by placing heavier feudal obligations on the peasantry was the only way the latifundista could compete with capitalist extensive agriculture on the world market.

That the national bourgeoisie under the old oligarchic regimes did not have overall social dominance is true. It was prevented from fashioning the national economy to suit its own ends not only by the oligarchy but by US imperialist control of the raw materials sector which was linked to the metropolitan economies (e.g. Venezuelan oil). Its desire to change the situation in its favour was counteracted by its realisation that it would have to call on mass support. However, such mass action might challenge not only quasi-feudal property, but all forms of private property. Goulart, in Brazil, deserted the 'national struggle' because of these very fears, shortly after the PCB praised him as a 'great national leader'. At the moment of his desertion the CIA organised a coup to preserve the status quo and crush the mass movement Goulart had awakened but refused to lead.

Since 1964 US imperialism has thought it opportune to itself incorporate the various national bourgeoisies into the central commands of the economy on a partnership basis, and defuse the potentially explosive situation in the countryside. This shift in policy has in part been determined by a shift in imperialist investment patterns. Super-exploitation in agriculture and the extractive industries have become increasingly unprofitable owing to the increase in labour intensive industry in the west. The fall in the price of Chilean copper on the world market is but one example of the relative unprofitability and the inefficiency this generates. The big US companies in Chile before nationalisation reduced their copper production in order to maintain price levels.

A major advantage would accrue to imperialism if it was allowed to leave the primary sector in the backward countries (with 'adequate' financial inducements from the governments concerned) and reinvest its capital in industrial enterprises often in partnership with 'national' concerns. Thus the various Latin American governments could appear to possess their basic economic infrastructure, taken over and rationalised at their own expense, and imperialist investment, reorientated in the secondary sector, could assume a low profile.

The most successful practical application of this new dependency model has been in Peru. The 'left' military dictatorship there has carried out demagogically nationalisations without compensation (e.g. of Esso's oil refineries) while at the same time offering substantial compensation to other foreign companies which it hid behind more spectacular measures. It is also in the process of converting latifundista into industrialists while at the same time selling off the land to the peasantry.<sup>3</sup>

In many respects Chile was a special case, containing elements in the overall models held either by the Stalinists or US imperialism, but also it compared closely with the politico-economic situation in immediate post-World War 2 western Europe. What differentiated Chile from the other countries in the US imperialist model was that industry already had large enterprises in partnership with imperialism. Traditional Chilean families were well represented at shareholders' meetings in New York. The mining sector, unlike elsewhere, was once the possession of the Chilean bourgeoisie. The latifundista problem was complicated by the fact that large latifundistas were also well established industrialists.

The curious fusion between Latin American and European conditions represented by Chilean society did not go amiss as far as the Stalinists were concerned. The main struggle was not against the feudal sector because this was



hardly separable from the capitalist one. Instead, the PCCh saw the struggle as the process of 'recovering the nation' from imperialism (in similar terms to the CPGB's conceptions relating to the EEC and the 'multi-national' companies).

Ignoring how the 'nation' (i.e. the industries previously controlled by the Chilean bourgeoisie) was taken away in the first place, the PCCh reserved a role for potentially 'good patriots', the bourgeois Christian Democrats, whilst seeing that the right wing Nationalists were 'hopelessly reactionary' and therefore unable to take part in the national struggle. Viewing uncritically the 'Chileanisation' measures of Frei (which took over up to 50% of US copper holdings with compensation), the PCCh saw a 'confirmation' of their theory. This explains their support for the Frei land reforms in 1964, and also their desire up until the very day of the Coup, to come to an agreement with the Christian Democrats' leadership even if that meant exclusion of the PCCh from government.

However, the 'nationalisations' and land reform of the Frei period combined the worst of both worlds. The working class and petit bourgeoisie disliked bearing the heavy burden that 'compensation' entailed. Chile became the second most indebted country in the world, due to the colossal amounts paid out by the Chilean state to the US companies as indemnity. Frei paid for this mainly through the printing of additional currency, and the inflation this engendered fell heavily on the living standards of the masses. Imperialism was also worried by the Frei experiment which it had initially sponsored. The half-hearted expropriation measures had heightened the consciousness of the masses and led to a movement for land seizure independent of the governmental bureaucracy. Frei tried to repress the movement, but was unable to do so within the confines of bourgeois democracy.

In many respects, Allende's agrarian and industrial policies were merely radical variants of those implemented under Frei. Allende completed the nationalisation of the copper industry (a decision ratified by the entire Chilean Congress, including the extreme right), but he also assumed these companies' debts. More important, Allende was hesitant about moving against the industrial sector. The Popular Unity programme had envisaged a 'mixed' economy, and most of the nationalisations of manufacturing firms were in fact recognitions by the government of the de facto takeovers by the workers. Moreover, all industries which passed to state control were not run by the workers themselves. Instead the government appointed a state 'intervenor'. One such appointee, a member of the Socialist Party, was ejected by his fellow party members who also happened to be workers at the self-same factory!

Allende constantly urged workers to exercise 'restraint' in the matter of wages as well. Although, to the credit of the Popular Unity, substantial wage increases were gained in the government's early period, the familiar themes of "wage moderation" and "increased productivity" were thought of as the means to conquer inflation and extract the country from indebtedness. The 'battle for production' involved excessive working hours with few rewards, hindering working class defensive preparations against the impending coup. The Allende government never took measures to combat effectively the real culprits of inflation, the bourgeoisie, who invested their available capital in black market dealings.

With factory occupations and the establishment of the Cordones Industriales developing alongside and in conflict with the government programme, the situation in the countryside provided little contrast. The Popular Unity was content to use the bureaucratic department (CORA), established by the previous administration, to extend the purchase of land by the state and its redistribution to the peasantry. The government not only compensated the big landowners but allowed them to keep their cattle and machinery also.

At the time of Allende's coming to office a wave of land occupations, some spontaneous, some encouraged by the MIR, broke out. Allende, unlike Frei, did

not wish to use the police to evict peasant squatters. In fact, the police stood aside in many disputes and allowed the armed landlords and their thugs to 'deal' with occupations. By May 1971, however, Allende had taken the heat out of the land mobilisations mainly by agreeing with the MIR that their members should not continue them.

What Allende could not halt so easily were factory occupations. These broke out in November of the following year after the government had faced its first serious crisis, when after the so-called bosses' strike Allende incorporated the military into his cabinet. The contradiction between the factory occupations and Allende's political position was posed sharply in a left Socialist Party paper: *There is going to be another bosses' strike, and the government is handing back the plants to the fascists so that they can make another try. ... The big problem is that we are not going to give them back. The government said for us to make these plants produce, and we did, and now we are not going to give them back. What is the government going to do? Shoot us? They didn't drive the rich out of the enclaves where they were holding the trucks. Are they going to drive us government supporters out of the plants? What a dilemma, Companero Presidente!*

When his election was ratified by Congress in 1970 Allende had willingly allowed himself to be tied to the bourgeoisie. He gained their votes for ratification by presenting a 'Statute of Constitutional Guarantees', which included the promise not to interfere in the army or allow the establishment of any para-military group which threatened to overthrow the state. Despite some extreme rightist attempts to strangle Popular Unity in its infancy (eg the assassination of General Schneider), the majority of the bourgeoisie were prepared to sit it out, impeaching the odd minister, rejecting this or that legislative Article. For them, Allende was not the problem; the problem was the unpredictable forces which stood behind him.

The start of the factory occupations in late '72 really got the bourgeoisie worried and from then on the idea of a coup as a solution began to gain ground. But coups, like revolutions, require preparation. The response of the victim has to be gauged. The centres of resistance have to be pinpointed. The weak spots in the armed forces have to be located and rooted out. These were the intentions of those who planned the abortive coup of June 29th 1973, the dress rehearsal for the final bloody showdown. With all three objectives they succeeded admirably.

Immediately after the June coup became public knowledge, workers began to distribute arms, take over and barricade factories. Their 'leaders' told them, as they were to tell them three months later, to be on the alert and leave it to the 'loyal' sections of the armed forces to 'restore order'. The army quickly dealt with the two tank battalions surrounding La Moneda, no doubt with an element of farce so far as the knowledgeable plotters on both sides were concerned. Yet it wasn't so much the 'failed' coup which concerned the oh-so-constitutional congressmen, but the defensive preparations the workers had taken to combat it.

Two days later the attitude of Frei had decidedly shifted: *"The Cordones Industriales, with which they are trying to surround the city, were strengthened. And what is graver still, the certainty exists that arms were distributed. Strategic deployments were made and orders were issued as if Chile were on the brink of civil war."* Thus another aim of the conspirators had been fulfilled. The entire bourgeoisie was now committed to one final solution.

In the last days of the life of the Popular Unity, the bourgeois press was full of ominous bloodcurdling forebodings. In El Mercurio, today the only legal paper in Chile, an article headed "Anti-Communist satisfactions" talked openly of a "Brazilian" or "Indonesian" solution to the problems facing the bourgeoisie. *"Travelling through anti-communist countries like Brazil"* it said, *"offers profound satisfactions for those of us who have had to put up with the Communists for almost three years. In the first place, you find the Communists in their proper place, in hiding."*

The response to all this from Allende and the PCCh was unfortunately predictable enough. Luis Corvalan pleaded miserably that "*They (the bourgeois parties) are claiming that we have an orientation of replacing the professional army. No sir, we continue and will continue to support keeping our armed institutions strictly professional.*" Corvalan had always ruled out the creation of a 'parallel army' of the working class as tantamount to "showing distrust in the army"(!), yet in the very same months that he encouraged a false faith in the armed forces, they themselves were preparing to smash the party of which Corvalan was the General Secretary.

The majority of the Popular Unity leadership saw the army smash into the ranks of their supporters and did nothing. The notorious "arms control" law passed by Congress (with Popular Unity Deputies abstaining!) allowed the army to bust into factories and seize workers' arms caches. At Valparaiso, where sailors had discovered a plan for the final coup and begged the government to kick out their putschist officers, Allende openly disavowed the sailors, saying that they were "ultra-leftists" linking up with the ultra-right. The sailors were arrested by their commanders and tortured until they revealed the extent of government support in the navy.

The poor bewildered Corvalan, in his prison cell a month after the coup, wondered what went wrong. He told journalists that he couldn't understand the charges that the Junta made that the Popular Unity was going to overthrow the constitution and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. The sister parties of the PCCh, however, had to look for fancier excuses for the Chilean disaster, since their own programmes conformed so closely with the Chilean model.

The most obvious excuse they turned to was that, but for the CIA intervention, the Chilean 'road to socialism' was bound to succeed. This very narrow view of the world would exclude revolutions in every country excepting the USA (where intervention would not come from mysterious 'outside elements'). But what was US intervention at the Bay of Pigs in 1960? Outside intervention from the CIA? And did Castro willingly accept this intervention, or did he organise worker/peasant militias to kick the CIA mercenaries off the beaches? If the Stalinist parties are prepared to accept fatalistically the eventual intervention of the CIA, they might as well forget about politics altogether. If they don't take CIA intervention as part of their political calculations, they are guilty of totally irresponsible lunacy.

International Stalinist hacks have a psychology which sooner or later links the term 'CIA' with that of 'ultra-left'. Today, for them, CIA does not quite equal 'ultra-leftism', but the so-called ultra-left can 'play into the hands of reaction'. "*By their adventurism*" writes Jack Woddis "*they (the 'ultra-left') contributed to the alienation of large sections of the middle strata, and aggravated the situation of conflict at a time when the relation of class forces was still unfavourable. If the Popular Unity had been able to gain more time, then there would have been the possibility of winning a decisive majority of the people and this would have had its impact on the armed forces too.*" (What sort of impact, Woddis doesn't say.)

Such a sickeningly smug cover-up of yet another criminal Stalinist blunder may go down well with the old party faithful who have swallowed even cruder and more disgusting 'explanations' throughout the years, but it doesn't serve in the slightest those who wish to gain an approximation of what really happened in Chile.

The 'Ultra-left' did give Allende more time. The MIR called off its land occupations in May 1971 in an effort to 'gain the ear' of the President. There was no organised opposition to the politics of the Popular Unity government, just incoherent, diffuse rumblings mainly from within the ranks of the Socialist Party. What really caused the alienation of the middle strata was not the fact that Allende went too far, but that he didn't go far enough.

To many of the petit-bourgeois the workers were seen as the cause of the

erosion of their fixed incomes through inflation. Lacking trade union organisation to protect them, they felt in a typically petit-bourgeois fashion that the workers were gaining social benefits previously reserved for them; the supply of meat to working class suburbs and its scarcity in middle class districts is a good example of this. Because the bourgeoisie was not exposed before the middle class as the real culprits for the economic ills facing the country, because Allende was not prepared to mobilise the workers' might against that of the bourgeoisie, the petit-bourgeoisie — precisely because it was an intermediate class — naturally gravitated towards the strongest pole of attraction. If Allende had had "more time" in office he might have been removed by a mass fascist movement — even worse for the working class in terms of losses than the bloodthirsty 'gorrillas' who started their butchery last September (if no independent revolutionary force had arisen to challenge a mass Fascist party).

Finally, it would be too hopeful to expect the Stalinists to have changed their attitude to the military since the coup. Having thrown Lenin's 'State and Revolution' out of the window years ago, these reformists who pass themselves off as 'Communists' continue to believe that the armies of capitalism can be "basically democratic". As the PCCh statement of 7th January said: "*...the democratic traditions broken by the coup d'etat are not dead: they should be reconquered by the people in the struggle to put an end to the dictatorship.*" It is all as if the coup never happened. A small satanic element suddenly ascended from hell to take over the army. If the status quo were restored, perhaps some kind of exorcism could be employed to prevent any further blood sacrifice!

The miserable justifications for the failure of "Parliamentary socialism" in Chile which the Stalinists have offered were predictable, although one is still amazed by this latest example of idiocy and downright cynicism on their part.

Most of the 'Marxist' tendencies have added nothing new to our understanding by their remarks on Chile. <sup>4</sup> Only the USFI have attempted to come to grips with the richness of the Chilean experience. Yet the International Majority Tendency of the USFI has, through the course of this attempt at understanding, subordinated its politics to those of the Castroite MIR and because of this have painted the Popular Unity government in brighter colours than it deserves.

The USFI majority is guilty of counterposing the idea of a Popular Front and a reformist united front, as though a Chinese wall separated them, the latter being falsely seen as **qualitatively different** from the former. The reasoning behind this approach can best be examined with reference to Tariq Ali's pamphlet "*There is only one road to Socialism and Workers' Power*".

Ali writes "Was it [the UP] a classical popular front as existed ... in the 1930s?" He produces several reasons for why this wasn't so:

1. A popular front embodies the collaboration between a working class party and a party or parties of the bourgeoisie.
2. It is a tactic utilised by the bourgeoisie to contain the rise of the mass movement and keep a grip on the working class parties.
3. The 'stated aim' of the UP was 'socialism', whereas the popular fronts of the 1920s were pledged to combat fascism, and were "**completely within the political and ideological framework of bourgeois democracy**" (our emphasis).
4. The Chilean CP was on the right wing of the UP.
5. Because of the existence of a militant rank and file in the socialist party, the UP government could not selectively repress the mass movement and was therefore unsalvageable from this point of view as far as the bourgeoisie was concerned.

By taking these points one by one, it is easy to see how wrong they are, merely on the level of factual accuracy. It is simply not true to say that the 'classical popular front' needed the presence of a bourgeois party within its ranks in order to survive. As Trotsky pointed out in relation to Spain "[In the Spanish popular front] The bourgeoisie's place was occupied by its shadow. **Through the medium**

of the Stalinists, Socialists and Anarchists, the Spanish bourgeoisie subordinated the proletariat to itself without even bothering to participate in the Popular Front. The overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades went over, especially to the camp of Franco." (Our emphasis)

If you merely took at the composition of the UP government and find no major bourgeois parties there you can blindly say that the UP was not politically subordinated to the bourgeoisie. If you wish to substitute vulgar sociology for Marxism, you can even claim without qualification that Unidad Popular was a "Workers' Government" as most members of the IMG do. But of course from the very beginning the Allende government subordinated itself to the bourgeoisie, while the latter didn't even need to move from their seats in Congress. The "Statute of Constitutional Guarantees", the talk of loyalty to the constitution, the representation of the leaders of the military in the Allende cabinet on two occasions — are not these ample proof of political subordination? Surely Tariq Ali agrees that Prats, Ruiz and co. weren't nice 'neutral' Generals and Admirals, but political representatives of the bourgeoisie?

Taking up the second point, the bourgeoisie **did** give the Allende government the go-ahead on the conditions worked out in September 1970, and they **did** utilise the government to try to contain the mass movement. The "Arms Control" law and the incident at Valparaíso are obvious examples. The military used the very legality of the Allende government in order to destroy it. The UP was **certainly** utilised by the bourgeoisie, the point being that they could only utilise it for a limited period and with diminishing success. It had to give way to more drastic measures to contain the masses who had been instinctively striving to go beyond the reformist politics of the UP.

Thirdly, Ali argues that the UP was not formed to fight fascism. True enough. But since he states that a popular front government exists in Ceylon, was that formed to fight fascism? The stated aim of the UP was 'socialism', we also learn. But so what? That can be the stated aim of any class-colaborationist government, including popular fronts. Marxists do not go by what the UP saw its electoral victory or stated aim to be, but by what it did **concretely**. Concretely it did not go beyond the political and ideological framework of bourgeois democracy in its actions.

That the PCCh was on the right of the UP is a minor point. This was also the case in Spain. According to Trotsky "the Spanish Communist Party stood in the right wing of the popular front." Their position in Spain didn't stop them from repressing the workers' movement. In Chile, the PCCh and the right wing leaders of the SP actually **condoned** the selective repression of the sailors at Valparaíso, and otherwise stood aside when the military carried out similar actions.

Allende would probably have gone further if the bourgeoisie wished him to. Shortly before the coup, according to Le Moulde, "Allende was ready to introduce a constitutional reform strictly defining the three sectors of the economy (public, mixed and private) and restoring to their owners a number of factories occupied by the workers." (our emphasis) His downfall had less to do with a strong left pole in the SP which, according to Ali, prevented Allende from moving to the right, but with the bourgeoisie themselves, who did not think Allende was capable enough of suppressing the masses effectively. His repression would prove too selective and not indiscriminate. Allende wasn't even given the chance by the bourgeoisie to dissolve his own electoral coalition. They murdered him instead. Allende was crushed between two movements: bourgeois counter-revolution on the one hand, proletarian and peasant revolutionary mobilisation on the other.

Point by point refutation of Tariq Ali would risk reducing the argument to comparing features of the classical popular fronts of the 1930s and the popular front of today (or reformist united front as Ali would have it) and become

merely a semantic quibble. The point is to recognise the common essence of both popular frontism (involving a greater or lesser, or token, bourgeois presence in the government) and a reformist government of parties based on the working class. It lies in confining the working class to the framework of bourgeois democracy, in affirming that the party of the proletariat refuses to step beyond those limits. Differences there certainly are, but to counterpose 'reformist united front' against the popular front is to escape this essence, and ignore the fact that in Chile the leadership of the workers' parties, which was a petit-bourgeois leadership, pre-set those limits and refused to go beyond them in its actions.

Allende had personal courage, but personal courage is a quality not confined to revolutionaries alone, and he wasn't the first reformist to go down fighting reaction. It is true that he "went out of his way to associate himself with the Cuban revolution". This doesn't mean, however, that he deserved the association. Reformists and centrists of all hues have gone out of their way to associate themselves with the Russian revolution (eg the Anglo-Russia Committee) but only in order, through this association, to prepare to deceive and control the workers in their own countries. Castro's visit to Chile in 1971 did much to reinforce illusions in the 'parliamentary road', since this appeared to him to be the only alternative to the failure of the guerrilla movements during the sixties. Characteristically, Castro has reverted to his former faith in "armed struggle" as the means to achieve socialism, although this renewed belief may not last for long owing to the increased willingness of the Cuban leadership to toe the Moscow line. This is an unfortunate but inevitable fact.

What Ali, Blackburn and others have done is to accept uncritically Castro's rather narrow explanation for the success of the coup. They have frequently quoted Castro's remark "...if every worker and every peasant had had a rifle like it [the automatic rifle given by Castro to Allende] in his hands, there wouldn't have been any fascist coup!" Obviously, nobody can claim that arming the workers isn't an important thing for revolutionaries to demand. But this simply is not enough. In June, thousands of workers were armed by the PCCh and SP at the time of the abortive coup, and even if this situation applied in September one wouldn't rush to the conclusion that there would be a victorious outcome for the workers.

The thing to be remembered is that politics direct the gun. It was no good having guns if there was no organisation to enable the workers to resist in an organised way. In Chile no organisation existed which was suited to this task. What was lacking above all else was a revolutionary party whose programme and actions were independent from those of the Popular Unity.

The question of the nature of the government and the attitude to take to it was a life and death question for Chilean revolutionaries. The position of all revolutionaries would of course have been to defend the reformist government against reaction. That was precisely the position of the Bolsheviks when Kornilov threatened to overthrow Kerensky in August 1917. But such a position also implies that reformist governments have to be defended in order later to be overthrown. The failure of the major 'revolutionary' organisation, the MIR, to adopt this perspective, in fact its uncritical position in relation to the UP, meant that in its small way the MIR has contributed to the defeat. It also means that revolutionaries must criticise the MIR mercilessly, as well as the UP. The USFI majority blurs the criticisms of the MIR and by implication endorses the MIR's relationship to the UP — just as the refusal of certain centrists to criticise the POUM led them to logically endorse its policies. Indeed, it has even been suggested in a Ligue Communiste (French section, USFI) internal document that the USFI should tone down its criticisms of the MIR, because in many ways the TRO (then Chilean section of the USFI) was actually worse!

Interestingly enough, the approaches of the majority and minority to the problems of Latin America mirror respectively the approaches of 'Guevarists'

and reformists. On a formal level, it is difficult to differentiate the two. They generally both recognise the need for guerilla warfare in certain circumstances. But if we look more closely the minority, led by the American SWP, actually rule out guerilla warfare throughout the whole of Latin America. They reason that in repressive countries such as Brazil, guerilla warfare should not be embarked on because the regime could easily smash the revolutionaries. In countries where bourgeois democracy prevails, there's no point in having a guerilla army since legal work can be done. (This kind of 'heads I win, tails you lose' approach can be found in an SWP pamphlet where each individual country in Latin America is listed and guerilla warfare is ruled out in every case.)<sup>5</sup> This means that the SWP and its satellites engage primarily in electoral activity, and describe those who do otherwise as "ultra-left". In Ireland this has led them to support the Official IRA as against the Provisionals because the former stands for elections rather than fighting the army of British imperialism.

Needless to say, the majority tendency does the exact opposite, pursuing a guerilla warfare orientation which is at best justifiable (POR Combat in Bolivia before the Banzer coup), at worst, downright unprincipled (eg the PRT/ERP in Argentina). When the PRT was a section of the USFI Ernest Mandel actually admitted that a large minority of the membership supported the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the PRT wasn't, strictly speaking, engaged in guerilla warfare but in terrorism pure and simple, although what it termed "revolutionary war" stopped in time for the last Argentinian elections.

In relation to Chile the SWP minority was formally correct in the sense that it identified the Allende regime as a 'popular front' and stressed the need for a revolutionary party. Since none of its protegee parties were involved in the Chilean events it had the freedom to make the correct criticisms in its press, including criticisms of the MIR. But the majority presented a criticism of the MIR only to the extent of saying that the MIR was bureaucratic (i.e. it expelled the Chilean of the USFI, didn't hold conferences, etc), totally ignoring the worst aspects of the organisation's politics. The correct characterisation of the MIR is as a bureaucratised centrist organisation. From its pre-UP days, when it carried out bank raids and land occupations, it did a complete about-turn after the Allende election victory (which took it by surprise) and put itself at the disposal of the UP government. This opportunist move was prompted by desire to put pressure on the UP government to move it further to the left. Sacrificing mobilisations for land seizure for the sake of 'dialogue' with Allende was justified by the MIR on the grounds that "...government control, the use of part of the state apparatus and the neutralisation of the other give rise to a favourable mobilisation of the masses and can permit the change of the strength relationships in view of the final showdown of both camps."

But the MIR's opportunism did not stop there. They also made no attempt to break the rank and file members of the SP from reformism. As a comrade of Hugo Blanco's has said: "just as they did not seek to win the masses from reformism in the first phase (i.e. the ultra-left period, when they regarded elections as irrelevant) so they did not seek to do so in the second. They tended in fact, to support the left wing of the Socialist Party, helping it to keep the most militant workers from going beyond the framework of the UP."

Apart from their uncritical quoting of Altmirano's statements such as "people in overalls and people in uniforms are one", the MIR's work among the troops was hardly a model of Bolshevik practice. As one MIR writer put it in 'Punto Final: "Various MIR activists have been detained for sticking up posters saying "don't shoot down the masses" or "soldiers, disobey your officers who incite you to a golpa (coup)". The Right unanimously describes them as calls to military subversion. Nothing further from the truth! They only ask the soldiers not to obey officers who incite them to a golpa, that is to say, those who don't obey the authority of the Executive and what they are obliged to do by the law and constitution."

If the comparison of the MIR and the POUM is justified, it is because in many ways the MIR was worse than the POUM. At least the POUM tried to explain the Marxist analysis of the state, even when failing to be guided by that analysis in practice. At no time did the MIR denounce the class treason of the UP leaders. They contented themselves with being a left cover for the UP, playing the role of security men and "socialist revolutionary advisers", rather than attempting to build an alternative revolutionary leadership. Anybody who calls himself a Marxist and ignores this crucial fault in the MIR will fail in assisting Latin American revolutionaries in overcoming the problem that has been with them for over a decade, and which lead to the MIR's mistakes in the first place, namely the tendency to put armed struggle above everything else, to refuse to realise the necessity of a revolutionary party which can utilise all means at its disposal, including armed struggle, to win over the masses for a socialist revolution.

It is difficult to predict how soon the Chilean masses will recover from the Coup. The seriousness of the defeat, however, should in no way be underestimated. Optimistic predictions that the workers will rise up now that the face of 'fascism' has revealed itself seem highly dubious given the extent of the repression reported so far, particularly since much of this wishful thinking comes from the 'Communist' Parties.

The Chilean masses need, above all in this present situation, a programme which is worth fighting for. Such a prospect may be extremely distant since the "anti-fascist front" about to be formed by the PCCCh, the SP and the MIR will probably be dominated, like the Popular Unity government itself, by the politics of the PCCCh. The Chilean CP has already called for "unity of all the democratic forces", bringing in sections of the Christian Democracy — whose leadership welcomed the Coup! The other two parties in the 'anti-fascist front' will reluctantly toe such a line, since they depend on Cuban support and have no wish to antagonise the Cuban leadership.

The revolutionary wave may not rise again in Chile for many years yet. The next great testing ground for contending classes in Latin America will be Argentina. Here Stalinism has traditionally been weak, and groups calling themselves Trotskyist are stronger than elsewhere, though still pretty feeble. Although their situation is different, it is important for them, and for all revolutionaries, to learn the lessons of Chile. For, as we have seen, it is not only the Stalinists who have failed to learn. Situations like Chile have happened before and are almost certain to happen again. Revolutionaries must re-examine the experience, for it is only they who can intervene consciously to change such situations in favour of the working class.

## NOTES

1. John Petras, 'Political and Social forces in Chilean Development.
2. Regis Debray, 'Conversations with Allende — Socialism in Chile'.
3. Annibal Quijano, 'Industrialisation and Neo-Capitalism in Peru'.
4. At one meeting it was suggested by a member of 'Militant' that if only Allende had read a copy of their review he would have been able to avert the coup. (This is very similar to the subjectivist approach of the IMG's talk of Allende not having the "right strategy", ignoring the ideological aspect of the UP.) 'Militant' presumably thought that socialism could be won by passively placing demands on Allende's government. Whether fortunate or not, a Chilean Ted Grant did not exist, but quite clearly what was needed was to break the masses from the Socialist Party organisationally as well as politically. In that party there were oppositional groupings who hoped they could win the organisation to a revolutionary line, but in fact got trapped in the party structure and in the end capitulated to their leaderships. The WRP (SLL) has of course been screaming "Stalinist betrayal". Yet, whilst not denying the treacherous role the Stalinists did play in Chile, to put them on the same level as the Pinochet 'gorillas' is utter nonsense. The "conscious traitor" Corvalan is now facing death, his son already murdered. But the Healyite answer to the Chile defeat, as with everything else, was not solidarity action but "a general strike to bring down the Tories".
5. Peter Canéjo, 'Guevara's Guerrilla Strategy: A critique and some proposals'.
6. Ernest Groun, 'In Defence of Leninism, in defence of the Fourth International' (which should more aptly be entitled 'In defence of an atrocious record in Latin America').

# Stalinism in Vietnam

by martin thomas

'Le Parti Communiste Vietnamien', by Pierre Rousset. (Maspero 1973, 18 francs. Available in Britain from Books, 84 Woodhouse Rd, Leeds 2).

THE BASIC conclusion of this book is that the Vietnamese Communist Party 'belongs to that generation of Communist Parties that, before and after the Second World War, broke in practice with the international politics of the Soviet bureaucracy. In Greece, in Yugoslavia, in Vietnam... Of all these parties, the VCP is the one which has been furthest in the rediscovery of the principles of Marxism.' (p. 98, Rousset's emphasis). The VCP's reorientation is seen as dating from about 1939.

For revolutionaries who have been active in support for the Vietnamese struggle, and who have drawn inspiration from its heroism, Rousset's conclusion is attractive<sup>2</sup>. We shall argue, however, that it is not correct.

Rousset's method is fundamentally this: he gives a largely accurate account of the history of the struggle, and of the statements of the VCP leadership. Every militant action or statement that helps to prove his conclusion is played up and taken absolutely at face value; every rightist action is played down as an "ambiguity", an "opportunist lapse", a "moment of distortion", etc.

Let us take as an example the events of 1945-46. In March 1942 the Japanese seized Vietnam from the French. The VCP-led Vietminh developed guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. After the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945 they took power without much trouble. They then welcomed British forces into Vietnam. The British declared Martial Law, rearmed the bulk of the 5,000 French

troops who had been under Japanese internment, and, using the assistance of Japanese troops, restored a French colonial regime in Saigon.

"During the war", as Rousset points out (p. 43), "the Vietminh had often contacted the Gaullists and the American forces"<sup>3</sup>. The VCP now went to the point of dissolving itself in order to "destroy any misunderstanding, domestic or external, which might hinder the liberation of our country" (p. 43). "In power, the Vietnamese government, with Ho Chi Minh as President, entered a long process of negotiations with France. The stated objective became: independence inside the French Union. On 6 March 1946, a preliminary agreement pending further negotiations was signed. The French government recognised the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a 'free state'. But the word 'independence' is not mentioned... and point 2 specifies that 'the government of Vietnam declares itself ready to welcome the French Army amicably.'" (p. 43-44). An agreement signed in September 1946 largely restated the March agreement, but in late 1946 war broke out, and continued until the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Meanwhile the VCP had been set up anew in 1951.

The Vietminh's agreements with the French aroused considerable popular opposition. The Vietminh, in response, did not hesitate to murder several Trotskyists.

How does Rousset analyse these events? He quotes a Vietminh circular of August 1944:

"Our impending uprising will be carried out in highly favourable conditions, without parallel in the history of our country. The occasion being propitious and the factors favourable, it would be unforgivable not to take advantage of

them. It would be a crime against the history of our country" (p. 40).

He calls this text "truly prophetic". Yet he maintains that the VCP did not subordinate its politics to alliances with French and American imperialism (pp. 38, 43). He states that "In power 'by surprise' without having the political and military means to guarantee their survival, they (the VCP) are going to be led to seek compromises to gain time" (p. 42). After quoting a speech by Giap after the March 1946 agreement, he comments "this speech... is convincing, at least as regards the need for the Vietminh to gain time. It does not, however, justify the opportunist lapses in the policy of the VCP at that time (abandonment of the radical land reform, dissolution of the CP, assassination of the Trotskyists, extreme 'flexibility' of the negotiators with France...)"

If the conditions of 1945-46 were "highly favourable" — and we believe they were — surely it was imperialism that "gained time" more by the accords<sup>4</sup>. If the VCP were "truly prophetic", their power was surely not "by surprise"? Giap's speech was intended precisely to justify the "opportunist lapses" of the VCP, and if it is "convincing" it should convince us that those lapses were not lapses but correct tactics.

On the murders of the Trotskyists, Rousset writes that they "illustrate at least two things: the width of the political gulf then separating the Trotskyist groups from the VCP, the first probably underestimating the importance of the national question in the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses, the second profoundly underestimating the social question in the colonial revolution, including its early stages; and the existence, certainly reinforced in this period, of authentically stalinist currents in the VCP, at least in their methods, if not in their political thought" (p. 44-45).

The reference to the Trotskyists "underestimating the importance of the national question" is not backed up by any extended argument at all. It is sheer nonsense. At that very time the VCP were negotiating for peace within the French Union. In a statement of aims in July 1945, they proposed: "Independence shall be granted to this country in a minimum of five years and a maximum of ten". The murder of Ta Thu Thau, at least, was provoked by his outspoken opposition to allowing the British to take control in 1945. Was he "underestimating the national question"? And as Rousset himself makes clear, the assassinations were the responsibility of the whole VCP leadership, not just "currents".

Rousset's approach to the question of permanent revolution is similarly woolly. He justifies his claim that "the Vietnamese leadership as a whole has assimilated the decisive implications of the permanent revolution for the colonial and semi-colonial countries" by long quotations from Vietnamese sources, summing up as follows: "the themes of 'skipping the stage of capitalist development', 'worker-peasant alliance', 'leadership of the party in the revolution, first factor of victory', are common to all the writings of the principal leaders of the VCP" (p. 98).

But it is scarcely possible today for even the most right-wing stalinists to flatly deny the possibility of socialist revolution in backward countries. They make verbal concessions to experiences like the Chinese and Cuban revolutions — without on that account abandoning their basic class-collaborationist policy. This can be seen in almost any stalinist text, not only those of the Vietnamese. Let us take an example at random. Charles Bettelheim, a prominent French stalinist, writes in his book "*La construction du socialisme en Chine*":

"... the Chinese revolution... passed without interruption, that is, in the framework of a single process, from the stage of the new-democratic revolution to the stage of the socialist revolution" (p. 14).

"The leading role of the party which constitutes the vanguard of the working class and which, applying the lessons of Marxism-Leninism, realises the class alliances necessary for the seizure of power. The fundamental alliance, in a country where the peasantry predominates, is evidently that of the working class and the peasantry itself" (p. 16).

Are we to believe that Bettelheim has assimilated the theory of permanent revolution?

In fact, even the Chinese combined talk of 'uninterrupted' revolution based on the experience of their own revolution with the classical stalinist stages theory in the 1960s. They talked of 'uninterrupted revolution', but nevertheless, where they had influence, as with the mass Indonesian Communist Party before the massacre of 1965, used it in favour of the type of stalinist "stages of revolution" policy that had led to the defeat of Chinese Communism in 1927.

Rousset in fact quotes Vietnamese texts with quite clear "stages" formulations. But he explains this as merely "stalino-maoist terminology"! His argument appears to be that the VCP has shown in action that it understands permanent revolution, but is using the terminology of national unity and class-collaboration as 'soft soap' to



extend its popular base (see p.106-7). Similarly Ernest Mandel has argued that:

"A 'policy' is not a set of words on paper, but a line one follows in action. The bloc of four classes meant the subordination of the C.P. to the Kuomintang, the subordination of the workers to the bourgeois army (which hastened to disarm and kill the workers), the refusal to touch the property of the landlords, urban capitalists, and rich peasants in the countryside, for fear of upsetting the (bourgeois) army" (*International* vol.1 no.2, p.24).

"Because for us the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean revolutions are distorted socialist revolutions (i.e. led by bureaucratically distorted working class parties) we prefer not to call the parties which led these revolutions 'Stalinist' parties" (ibid. p.25)<sup>5</sup>

Since the VCP fights heroically, it cannot be Stalinist (see Rousset p. 136)<sup>6</sup> But this is as if one were to declare that all men have two legs, and then, on meeting a man with one leg, to refuse to recognise him as a man.

Partial or episodic going beyond its programme is not unknown for an opportunist party, particularly in a situation like Vietnam with virtually the whole nation transformed into a mass of dispossessed people.

Reformism means subservience to bourgeois law, and confining working class political action to elections. In July 1972 Labour leaders such as Wedgwood Benn applauded working class action against bourgeois law. In March 1920, the leader of the German TUC, Karl Legien, who had been a fierce opponent of the general strike in the Second International debates on the question, called a general strike against a right-wing putsch. (Meanwhile the German CP, under ultra-left influence, initially opposed the strike). Were Legien, or Benn, no longer reformists?

Petty bourgeois nationalism means illusions in, and subservience to, 'neo-colonial' solutions. The Irish Republican Army fought fiercely against the 'neo-colonial' solution accepted by the Free Staters in the early 1920s. Both wings of the IRA today have more advanced programmes and vastly more proletarian composition than the VCP, but Rousset and Mandel would surely agree that the IRA, despite its heroic struggle, is nevertheless a petty bourgeois nationalist tendency.

The overall record of the VCP in action does show the marks of stalinism. Its attitude in 1945-46, described above; its excessive concessions in 1954, while

hailing the Geneva agreement as a great victory; its bureaucratic practices in North Vietnam; its neglect of work in the towns; the failure of North Vietnam to come to the aid of resistance in the South until 1960, and the scantiness of their aid until 1965; its support for Sihanouk in Cambodia; its practice of secret diplomacy; its description of the 1972 truce as a great victory; and its support for the coalition in Laos.

Rousset's argument, then, is characterised by extreme woolliness and lack of critical sharpness. It is a product — an extreme product — of the decomposition and blunting of Marxist concepts in the period since the post World War 2 crisis of Trotskyism developed.

## NOTES

(1) For convenience I use the name Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) throughout although in fact the party has had different names. (Today it is the Vietnamese Workers Party in the north, and the Popular Revolutionary Party in the south).

(2) The book reflects the line of the majority tendency of the Fourth International. The International Marxist Group, in Vol.1 No.5 of their magazine *International*, endorse Rousset's conclusions, and promise to discuss the history of the VCP in a future issue of *International*.

(3) "As the American national anthem rang out that day (26 August 1945), Vo Nguyen Giap was observed saluting the Stars and Stripes with a clenched fist" — Jean Lacouture, '*Ho Chi Minh*', p.100

(4) I do not claim that victory would be certain if the VCP had fought in 1945-46. Victory is never certain. But surely it is better to fight even against the odds — than to sacrifice principle. Ernest Mandel recognised this elsewhere: "Was Trotsky's struggle in the '20s then only a 'pose' for history's sake, in order to 'save the programme'? Let it be said in passing that even from that point of view it would have been completely justified..." (New Left Review 47, p.45)

(5) Mandel does not seem to agree entirely with Rousset, however. On p.22 he characterises the VCP as "a far cry from revolutionary Marxism."

(6) It is ironic that at the same time as the IMG derive the non-stalinism of the VCP from its militancy, they are lecturing the British left on the theme that militancy in and of itself is no proof of revolutionary qualities, going so far as to say: "The most extreme and advanced methods of struggle have been undertaken by confused or even reactionary groups of workers and in particular 'mass mobilisations' are frequently used by reformists to divert the struggle. No, the essential point lies in how revolutionaries justify their struggle, or, put in other terms, how partial parts of a programme relate to the whole programme."

# The Belgian Experiment

by Rosa Luxemburg

*first english translation  
by andrew hornung*

Continuing our series of translations from the discussions of Luxemburg, Vandervelde and others on the Belgian General Strike of 1902.

The whole of the international working class followed the great events in Belgium with bated breath. Now the collapse of these actions comes as a great blow to the workers' movement in every country. There is no point retreating into the customary comfortable generalities of "the battle has not been given up but merely postponed" or "despite everything our cause goes marching on" or again "sooner or later victory will be ours in Belgium or elsewhere". Generalities to the effect that in the final analysis the course of history is biased in our direction ought not to be applied when analysing any specific episode of class struggle. They constitute only the objective underpinnings of our struggles and our victories. The only things that are relevant are the subjective aspects, the consciousness of the workers' movement in the struggle and its leaders, their ability to ensure victory by the shortest path. From this standpoint it seems to us that our first duty on hearing of our brothers' defeat is to draw up as clearly as possible the balance sheet of its causes.

The first thing that strikes us, surveying the events of the short campaign of the last few weeks, is the lack of a clear, consistent tactical line on the part of the Belgian leaders.

First we see them resitricit the struggle to Parliament. Despite the fact that right from the beginning there was as good as no hope at all that the Clericalist<sup>1</sup> majority would capitulate, the Socialist parliamentary fraction made no effort to call a general strike. This call came instead from the highest sovereign body, those who finally count, the proletarian masses. On 14th April the Brussels "Le Peuple" wrote: "The government has decided, as they say, to hold out till the end. The working class is no less ready to give its all. And this is the very reason why the general strike was not called for by the political organs of the party but by its industrial representatives, not by the members of parliament but by the trade union delegates. It is the organised working class itself that has just decided to stop work everywhere, as it can see no other way of winning."

And this was confirmed in Parliament on 18th April by deputy Demblon: "After the outbreak of the general strike that exploded like a thunderclap, that came as a surprise even to us, who will dare claim that no one is agitated besides the agitators" (see the parliamentary report of "Le Peuple" of 19th April).

No sooner had the general strike broken out spontaneously, however, than the Socialist leaders declared their solidarity with the workers and pronounced the general stoppage of work as the highest form of struggle. 'General strike till victory' — that became the slogan of both the Socialist parliamentary fraction and the Labour Party leadership. Every day after the 15th April saw "Le Peuple" exhorting the strikers to stand firm and hold out.

"The Socialists", it said on the 16th, "did their very best to avoid this general strike; and the Easter Congress of our Party took no decision on the matter, allowing the means of struggle to be determined by the circumstances." But, the organ of the Belgian comrades went on to say, "**In the end only the general strike can guarantee us victory against all opposition**".

"There are no signs", said "Le Peuple" on the 17th, "of either weariness or demoralisation within the working class. That we swear in its name. **We will fight till victory**".

"The general strike", announces "Le Peuple" on the 18th, "will last as long as it takes to conquer universal suffrage!"

On the same day, the General Council of the Labour Party decided, on hearing of the parliamentary defeat of the resolution to change the constitution, **to continue the general strike**.

On the morning of the 20th, the organ of the Brussels federation wrote: "Nothing can secure universal suffrage for us now except a continuation of the general strike!"

And on the very same day both the Socialist fraction and the Party Executive executed an abrupt about turn and decided to **end the general strike**!

The campaign's other slogan, **the dissolution of Parliament**, expressed no less these vacillations. When on 15th April the Liberal parliamentary fraction called for the dissolution of Parliament, the Socialists refused to be involved and thus did not support the bourgeoisie's attempt to postpone the moment of decision either.

Now just before deciding to call off the general strike our comrades suddenly re-raise this slogan and "Le Peuple" of 20th recommends workers to "Use every strength to force a dissolution of Parliament!" And the last few days saw yet another radical change on this same question by the leadership. As late as the morning of the 20th, "Le Peuple" was still presenting the general strike as the sole means of forcing a dissolution of Parliament. On the same day, however, the Party Executive decided to call off the general strike and all of a sudden the sole means of forcing a dissolution of Parliament turns out to be the intervention of the **King**.

The various slogans of the recent campaign in Belgium represent a confused hotch potch of back tracking and zigzagging: from obstruction in Parliament, to general strike, dissolution of Parliament and the King's intervention. Yet none of these slogans was followed up with any consistency, and in the end for no apparent reason the whole campaign comes to a sudden halt and the working class is sent home with confusion on their faces and nothing in their hands.

If there was no hope of getting a majority in Parliament for a change in the constitution, then it is incomprehensible why the general strike should have been approved with such reservation and hesitation. And if the general strike was considered to be the sole means of waging the struggle, then it is a puzzle why it should have been called off just when it had got off to such a good start.

If it was reasonable to expect the dissolution of Parliament to result in a Clericalist defeat in the new elections, then our deputies' passivity on the occasion of the Liberals' motion for a dissolution of Parliament is all the more inexplicable; though hardly more inexplicable than this whole campaign for a revision of the constitution seeing as it could in any case be achieved by the next election. If, however, there is no hope of a favourable outcome in new elections

under the present voting system, then again the Socialists' enthusiasm for this slogan is inexplicable.

All the contradictions seem insoluble as long as one analyses the tactical line of the Belgian Socialists in the campaign **in isolation**. They can, however, be extremely simply explained the moment the position of the Socialists is seen in relation to that of the Liberals.

Above all the Liberals determined the very programme of the Socialists in the recent struggle. For example, it was on their say-so that the Labour Party dropped the demand for women's suffrage and was constrained to accept the clause on proportional representation.

The Liberals went so far as to dictate the **methods** the socialists should use in the struggle by raising their voices **against** the slogan of general strike before it even broke out; by restricting it within the bounds of legality when it had broken out; and by firstly projecting the slogan of a dissolution of Parliament, declaring the King to be the ultimate arbiter, and then in the end by deciding at their Party's meeting on the 19th (initially in opposition to the Socialist Party Executive's decision on the 18th) to call a halt to the general strike. The Socialist leaders merely had the job of from time to time acting as brokers to the working class of the slogans of their allies and composing the necessary agitational music to fit the Liberal libretti. And in the end the Socialists even carried out the ultimate will of the Liberals when on the next day, on the 20th, they sent their supporters home.

Thus throughout the campaign, the Liberal allies of the Socialists appear as the real **leaders**, the Socialists only as their obedient servants and the working class as a passive mass that, thanks to the mediation of the Socialists, was led a dance by the bourgeoisie.

The explanation for the contradictory and hesitant actions of the Belgian party leaders can be found in their position of middle men halfway between the workers storming into battle and the liberal bourgeoisie trying to hold them back for all they are worth.

But the leading role of the Liberals provides us not only with the key to the vacillations but also to the defeat of the campaign.

The mass strike has been the most effective political method utilised by the Belgian working class in the struggle for universal suffrage from 1886 to the present date. It brought about the first capitulation of the Government and Parliament in 1891 — the initial phase of constitutional reform; in 1893 it brought about the second capitulation by the party in power — with its issue, universal suffrage with plural voting.

It is clear that this time again only the pressure of the working masses on the Government and Parliament could yield any tangible result. As far back as the '90s when it was just a matter of a beginning of concessions being made, the Clericals put up a desperate resistance. Now, when all the rest of their privileges are at stake, when it is a matter of conceding the domination of Parliament itself, isn't it obvious to anyone that they will fight as if their very lives depend on it? Clearly the thunder of parliamentary rhetoric would achieve nothing. Only the most tremendous mass pressure could defeat the Government this time given their extreme resistance.

In the light of this, the first disturbing sign of the fact that the politics of the Liberals had rubbed off on our comrades was the hesitation in proclaiming a general strike right from the start, revealing the clear unspoken hope or wish, at least, that victory might after all be achieved without a mass strike. They began to adopt the hope that the Liberals we know have, that all the walls of reaction will come tumbling down at the sound of that trumpet of Jericho, parliamentary speechifying.

But additionally the use of the political mass strike constitutes a quite specific problem in Belgium because of its unique political conditions. For the immediate **economic** consequences of the strike hit first and foremost the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, and only to a lesser extent do they hit the real enemy, the Clerical Party. The **political** effect of the mass strike in the present struggle against the ruling Clerical Party is at best **indirect**, taking the form of the pressure that the Liberal bourgeoisie in fact itself exerts on the government and the parliamentary majority because of the pressure on it of the general strike. Further, however, the general strike also exerts a **direct** political pressure on the Clericals insofar as it confronts them as the herald, the first stage, of a mounting out-and-out **insurrection**. The political significance of the peacefully striking masses has always lain and today still lies in their willingness and their ability to force the government to resign by means of riots and demonstrations in the event of a stubborn refusal to give in by the majority in Parliament.

Through their compromise alliance with the Liberals, our Belgian comrades have excluded the general strike from having either of these political consequences.

Firstly, when under the pressure of the Liberals the Socialists limited the aims and forms of struggle to existing legality and forbade every demonstration and every action of the masses, they dissipated the latent political power of the general strike. There was never any reason for the Clericals to fear a mass strike which **come what may** would remain passive. A general strike that has in **advance** had fastened to it the fetters of legality is like an artillery demonstration that begins with the shot being thrown into the water in front of the enemy's very eyes. This threat "with folded arms", which "Le Peuple" recommends to its readers in all seriousness couldn't frighten a child, let alone a class fighting a life and death struggle for what is left of its political dominance. The Belgian proletariat's peaceful strikes of 1891 and 1893 were enough to break the Clericals' resistance precisely because they were afraid that peace would transform itself into violence and the strike would be transformed into an insurrection. Thus it is quite possible for the working class to have avoided using force this time too. But the precondition for this was that the leaders did not start by laying down their arms and turning a battle formation on the march into a Sunday parade and making a meaningless token blast out of a general strike.

Secondly, however, the alliance with the Liberals also destroys the other, indirect, effect of the general strike. The pressure on the bourgeoisie of the stoppage of work only takes on a political significance if the bourgeoisie is forced in turn to put pressure on its political superiors, the ruling Clericals. This will only happen, however, if it feels the presence of the proletariat behind it like some ferocious beast it will never shake off.

The above result is, however, impossible the moment the bourgeoisie is in the comfortable position of, instead of passing on the pressure it feels to its political superiors, actually turning back to confront its proletarian inferiors and shaking off any unpleasant pressure with a shrug of the shoulders.

But this was precisely the position of the Belgian bourgeoisie in the recent struggle, because the alliance allowed it to determine the actions of the working masses and, in the event, command an end to the general strike. And that is exactly what happened too. As soon as the strike started to bite seriously as far as the bourgeoisie were concerned, the order went out: "Back to work!" — and any question of the 'pressure' of a general strike disappeared with that.

Thus the final defeat appears to be the unavoidable result of the tactical line chosen by our Belgian comrades. Their parliamentary action remained ineffective because the pressure of the general strike was not there. And the

general strike remained ineffective because behind it in turn there was no threat of the actions of the mass movement following its unrestricted logic — no spectre of revolution.

In short: the extraparlimentary action was subordinated to the parliamentary, and precisely for this reason both remained fruitless and the whole battle was doomed to become a fiasco.

The phase in the struggle for universal suffrage which has just closed constitutes a turning point for the Belgian labour movement. For the first time the Socialist Party in Belgium, because of its formal compromise binding it to the Liberals in the struggle, showed exactly the same traits as the ministerialist fraction of the French Socialists allied with the Radicals and proved to be a 'Prometheus bound'. We are unreservedly of the opinion that the future of the struggle for universal suffrage in Belgium and of the labour movement in general depends on our comrades' understanding that they should steer clear of the suffocating embraces of the Liberals. But then this latest experiment on the part of the Belgian Socialists is full of lessons for the international proletariat. What we have witnessed is nothing more or less than the effects of the same debilitating, nerveless pollen of opportunism that has been wafting over the country for some years now and lately found its issue in the fateful alliance of our Belgian comrades and the liberal bourgeoisie.

The defeat just suffered in Belgium should serve as a particular warning against those policies which could lead to substantial defeats in one country after another, ending in a falling off in that discipline and that boundless confidence which the masses have in us Socialists — that quality which alone gives us our power, but which we could lose one day because of parliamentary illusions and opportunist experiments.

*Die Neue Zeit (Stuttgart). Year 20, 1901 — 2 vol. 2 p. 105 — 110.*



A demonstrator, killed by troops in a street clash, is carried away by his comrades.

# AGAIN ON THE BELGIAN EXPERIMENT

by emile vander velde

I have just read Comrade R. Luxemburg's article in *DIE NEUE ZEIT* in which she forcefully criticises the tactical line of the Belgian Labour Party in its fight for universal suffrage.

It might have been rather more fraternal had she waited till our enemies had ceased their attacks on us; but this is only by the bye. What really is important though is to correct right now — without waiting for a more exhaustive report of the developments in Belgium — some of our comrade's markedly false allegations.

In fact, according to Comrade Luxemburg, the Liberals snatched the reins of our movement out of our hands; they determined the aims; they chose the tactics to be used — in short, the Liberals set up the General Council of the Labour Party as **their** spokesmen!

Such allegations must sound strange to anyone who knows anything about Belgian Liberalism — knowing the sense of resignation and deep reluctance felt by the Liberals (who as bourgeois benefit from the plural voting system no less than the Clericals) as they were finally dragged like a convict to the gallows into the agreement to support universal suffrage.

Winning their support for the constitutional change took years of unrelenting propaganda and the threat of the secession of a whole number of their members.

To clinch this support we had to limit the movement **for the present time** — without there being, by the way, any formal pact between the Liberals and the Socialists — to universal suffrage for men and exclude it for women.

For myself I opposed this decision as long as I could; but I really must state here that it came about less as a concession to Liberalism and more out of a consideration for the great mass of workers, who, to my deep regret, were very hostile to the idea of an **immediate** introduction of female suffrage, fearing that this would strengthen the domination of the Clericals for a whole period.

Be that as it may, even if it is true that the three opposition parties, Liberals, Socialists, and Christian Democrats, were able to find agreement on the aim of the campaign in exactly the same way as the Independents and the German Social Democrats are united in the struggle against protectionist tariffs, it is absolutely untrue that there was any kind of alliance or agreement reached between the Liberals and Socialists as far as tactics were concerned or on the way in which the struggle was to be fought.

Right from the beginning of the campaign — and incidentally this surprised no one — the Liberals, who right from the outset treated all extraparliamentary action as taboo, attacked us. The mayors of Brussels and other towns where, thanks to the local electoral system, the Liberals are in the leadership, organised repressions no less severe than those of the Government, and the Labour Party that *DIE NEUE ZEIT* represents as the obedient handmaiden of Liberalism was totally isolated in the face of a coalition of the forces of the bourgeoisie.

In this situation which was quite different from when the Van den Peereboom ministry was toppled street actions were useless. What could the thousands of demonstrators with all their courage do against the rifles of the gendarmerie and the civil guard together with the 60,000 bayonets of the regular army — an army that certainly was not reliable in the eyes of the Government, but whose greater part would at least have obeyed an order to fire on the demonstrators?

All that remained was the General Strike — that mighty demonstration of strength with over 300,000 people stopping work with a hitherto unheard of suddenness to demand their rights.

The events have proved that this demonstration was insufficient to break the resistance of the Clerical majority. But we would vehemently dispute the allegation that it was useless.

And to prove this we need only state that the leader of the Right, the soul of the resistance, Herr Woeste, who three weeks earlier would not even listen to any arguments about constitutional change, who went so far as to dispute the very existence of a movement for such change, felt forced to make the following declaration at the time of voting on 18th April.

*"We know that institutions are not unchangeable. Laws can be changed, and if all the parties were prepared to look dispassionately at the question of suffrage and to seek a solution amongst those practicable now without going so far as to demand universal suffrage pure and simple, then I am convinced that a majority of us could unite around such a proposal."*

Thus the Right reveals that it realises that it must soon resign itself to the change. The Left agrees to a man, and the moment the change is decided on we can be absolutely sure that the move will end in the victory of universal suffrage.

For the present though our motion for a constitutional change was rejected, but it would be absurd to think that the continuation of the General Strike would have been able to force the majority to change its vote.

On the other hand, on 20th April, two days after the vote in Parliament, it became quite clear that the King had declared his solidarity with his ministers and refused to make use of his right to dissolve Parliament — a fact that will not be forgotten by those propagandising the cause of Republicanism. What use could the continuation of a now doomed General Strike possibly have been from that point on?

Was it not much more appropriate to call it off the save the proletariat any further unnecessary sacrifice, to preserve its strength for a later attack, and to demonstrate once again the great discipline of the proletariat by returning to work with the unanimity with which we had laid our tools down.

It was this that the General Council of the Labour Party decided, not on the advice of the Radicals whose statement made not a whit of difference, but taking account of the opinions of the delegates from branches and trade union federations who voted 29 to 1 with 2 abstentions for an immediate resumption of work.

The next Congress of the Labour Party will judge whether this decision corresponded with the interests of the socialist cause with which we are all well acquainted. In the meantime I believe that our defeat has not dampened our fighting spirit and that we are determined to battle on till victory even more vigorously than before.

I thank the German comrades who gave us moral and financial support in those difficult days.

## POSTSCRIPT

When I wrote the above lines to *Die Neue Zeit*, I did not know anything about the article *A BLACK MAY DAY* (*Ein Dunkler Maitag*) which has appeared



unsigned, indicating that it is the work of the Editorial Board. I shall not reply to it as I believe that attacks directed against the Belgian Labour Party as a whole should be answered by the party itself. It will not fail to raise at the next meeting of the International Bureau the question of whether the right of criticism which we unconditionally extend to comrades in other countries gives them the right to make judgments on the basis of crudely distorted reports — judgments which are not only malicious but also damaging; indeed, judgments made not by a single individual but by the Editorial Board of an official journal.

**NOTE BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD, Brussels, 30th April 1902**

We shall not take up the above contribution on any of the points relating to Comrade Luxemburg's views, leaving them for her to reply to. The postscript demands, however, that we add our observations.

That Comrade Vandervelde is wrong in assuming that the article *A BLACK MAYDAY* is an editorial article is unimportant. *DIE NEUE ZEIT* does not usually carry editorial articles: Like most of our best articles this one stems from the pen of the author of our *LETTERS FROM BERLIN* — who is well known as someone who does not like anonymous attacks. It was a pure co-incidence that the name was omitted in this case. But as we said, this point is trivial, particularly as the opinion expressed in the article is one shared by the Editorial Board. No doubt it would be inappropriate if it really contained what Vandervelde sees in it. But even after the most careful search we can neither find attacks on the unity of the Belgian Labour Party nor malicious — let alone injurious — judgments in the article. As to the allegedly “crudely distorted reports” that formed the basis of the article's judgments, they were taken from *Le PEUPLE* and *VORWAERTS*, two sources which one cannot assume would crudely distort the facts to the disadvantages of our Belgian comrades. Nothing that was said in *NEUE ZEIT* has not been said by the Belgian comrades themselves — in fact, said more emphatically.

We remain rather unmoved at being threatened with the International Bureau. Even if it were justified in censoring the press (which we strenuously deny) we would not expect it to lend its authority to any restriction of criticism. The right that the comrades of any country have to direct sharp criticism at their own party leaders is something that we must allow also to comrades from other countries on all questions of international significance. The conventional politeness of the international diplomat would be quite out of place in the affairs of the international proletariat.

The present events in Belgium are, in fact, of international importance. They concern the proletarians of all lands intimately. The victories of our Belgian comrades were our victories, their defeats are also our defeats.

But that is not all. The various socialist parties have, even with all their differences, never had so many situations and problems in common: never, perhaps, could one nation learn so much from another as it can today. The tactical line that was followed yesterday in Belgium has its supporters here too, who would like nothing better than to put it into practice in Germany today. If the errors of the leading Belgian comrades were not mercilessly exposed, then there would be a danger of them being repeated here, together with their concomitant defeats.

We had, then, not only the **right**, but the **duty** to criticise the Belgian events, not in order to disparage our Belgian comrades, but to learn from them and thereby to teach our own Party and the whole international working class to beware the recurrence of similar defeats.

**Published with postscript and editorial reply in *NEUE ZEIT*.**

Next issue: Luxemburg's **AND FOR A THIRD TIME — THE BELGIAN GENERAL STRIKE**; and Mehring's **A BLACK MAY DAY**.

# The Workers' Government

(An historical excavation)

by john stirling

AS SUCCESSIVE waves of militancy beat against the breakwater of the labour bureaucracy, the question of how to win workers from the domination of that bureaucracy has new urgency for revolutionaries. To denounce the Labour Party and the trade union tops, their record, their betrayals, their ideas, is surely necessary — but by itself it is not enough. If it is simply a propaganda battle, then the reformists always have the advantages of greater resources and of having an ideology which corresponds well to the **surface appearances** of society.

Our confidence comes from the fact that the “laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus”. Capitalism dupes and deceives the working class, but it still digs its own grave by organising the working class and above all by forcing it to struggle. And as the working class learns the power of its collective solidarity in struggle, to that extent it rebels against the capitalist deceptions. The task of Marxists is to fuse this instinctive class drive with a conscious political fight and a scientific conception.

And in doing that we cannot simply wait on the sidelines until the working class (somehow, hopefully) reaches the highest level of struggle and of improvised socialist consciousness. We have to fight to bring out the progressive class content of even the most primitive struggles and feelings: including the struggles under the domination of the labour bureaucrats and the class sentiments veiled by illusions in those bureaucrats.

A chief weapon is the use of demands, directed at the labour bureaucrats, which aim to make the instinctive class drive sharper and more precise, and thus help to prepare the conditions for a break with the bureaucrats. And precisely this question of “demands on the leaders” has become the subject of many different interpretations on the revolutionary left.

In no. 1 of 'Permanent Revolution', we examined the present state of the Labour Party. But that is not the only question. The basic programmatic and tactical attitudes toward reformism have, we believe, been heavily bowdlerised. In this article we aim to clear away those bowdlerisations and unearth some authentic communist conceptions.

Immediately after the failure of the post World War I direct revolutionary upsurge, the question of tactics to win workers from reformism came to the fore in the Communist International. In 1920 Lenin wrote his pamphlet on 'Left Wing Communism'. The Third Congress of the Communist International, in mid 1921, launched the slogan of the "conquest of the masses". The Executive Committee of the Communist International at its session of 4th December 1921 proposed the tactic of the 'United Front'.

"... it is perfectly self evident that the class life of the proletariat is not suspended during this period preparatory to the revolution. Clashes with industrialists, with the bourgeoisie, with the state power, on the initiative of one side or the other, run their due course.

"In these clashes — insofar as they involve the vital interests of the entire working class, or its majority, or this or that section — the working masses sense the need of unity in action, of unity in resisting the onslaught of capitalism or unity in taking the offensive against it. Any party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers....

"Does the united front extend only to the working masses or does it also include the opportunist leaders?

"The very posing of this question is a product of misunderstanding.

"If we were able simply to unite the working masses round our own banner or around our own practical immediate slogans, and skip over reformist organisations, whether party or trade union, that would of course be the best thing in the world. But then the very question of the united front would not exist in its present form.

"The question arises from this, that certain very important sections of the working class belong to reformist organisations or support them. Their present experience is still insufficient to enable them to break with the reformist organisations and join us. It may be precisely after engaging in those mass activities which are on the order of the day, that a major change will take place in this connection. That is just what we are striving for. But that is not how matters stand at present....

"The Communists, as has been said, must not oppose such (i.e. united) actions, but on the contrary must also assume the initiative for them, precisely for the reason that the greater is the mass drawn into the movement, the higher its self confidence rises, all the more self confident will that mass movement be and all the more resolutely will it be capable of marching forward, however modest may be the initial slogans of struggle. And this means that the growth of the mass aspects of the movement tends to radicalise it, and creates much more favourable conditions for the slogans, methods of struggle, and, in general, the leading role of the Communist Party..." (Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol.2, p.91 to 94).

The United Front is not a plot — "It was not Lenin who invented the policy of the united front; like the split within the proletariat, it is imposed by the dialectics of the class struggle". (Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 394). Nor is it a strategy — "The tactical application of the united front is subordinated, in every given period, to a definite strategic conception" (ibid)

But it can justly be said that the united front is more than simply a tactic; or rather that it rests on certain principles of method which have more than passing tactical importance. Marxists do not disdain any stage of the struggle of our class, any twist or turn of historical development, or any necessary compromise. If scientific socialism means anything, it means that our socialist programme relates to every tack of historical development, however contradictory, rather than being a private dream which must be well sheltered from disappointing reality.

Today, it is clear that for a group the size of Workers Fight (or almost any other revolutionary grouping in the world) there can be no realistic thought of bringing the Labour Party or the trade unions into united fronts proposed by us in any but the most exceptional circumstances. How do we apply those principles of method?

The general way is through "placing demands". We engage, of course, in independent agitation and independent activity to the best of our resources. Without this independence, any tactic of united front or anything else is without value. But we cannot simply pass a blanket condemnation on the activities of the mass organisations and propose our own tiny scale activities instead. The working class faces certain tasks — resisting redundancies, for example. Very well, let us demand and pressure the leaders of the mass organisations to carry out those tasks. We pledge ourselves to support every, even partial, step they make, with complete unity in action.

It is not a question of cunningly choosing demands so that they appear "reasonable", but which the bureaucrats will not carry out. It is not a question of attempting to invest the Labour Party with a total revolutionary (or supposedly revolutionary) programme. It is a question of promoting in the best way possible the urgent tasks of the working class, while maintaining the independent programme of the revolutionary organisation. "It is necessary, without delay, finally to elaborate a practical system of measures — not with the aim of merely 'exposing' the Social Democracy (before the Communists), but with the aim of the actual struggle against Fascism" — thus Trotsky explained the United Front in Germany (*Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 139)

The staple diet of this 'placing demands' in relation to the Labour Party will normally be attempt to enlist Labour Party support for ongoing struggles — strikes, demonstrations, and so on. But the Labour Party is not simply a mass organisation — it is also an alternative government. In that capacity it is possible to pose demands to it for measures such as nationalisation, which do not fall directly under the title of support for actual direct action.

At this point we approach the question of the Workers' Government — an extension of the United Front tactic proposed by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in late 1922. The idea was explained by Radek in these terms.

"Comrades, if curses could kill a party, we would ask comrade Zinoviev to sign a ukase ordering Scheidemann (German reformist) and company to disappear from the face of the earth. Since this is impossible, we must fight them. The only question is when we will be able to destroy them. It is possible that these people are so tightly bound to the bourgeoisie that they cannot break from them, so that we will have to destroy them together with the bourgeoisie. But it is also possible that there will come a time when, the coalition with the bourgeoisie having become impossible for them, they will be forced to enter a coalition with us. In this coalition they will attempt to betray us. We will be able to conquer them only after their action with the coalition will have discredited them totally..."

"Just as the workers say that the meaning of the United Front is that the communists and Social Democrats must make common cause in the factory

when there is a strike, so for the masses of the workers the idea of a Workers' Government has a similar significance. The workers are thinking of a government of all the working class parties.. In my opinion, when we are concerned with the struggle for the United Front, we ought to say bluntly that, if the Social Democratic workers will force their leaders to break with the bourgeoisie, then we are ready to participate in a workers government, so long as that government is an instrument of the class struggle."

The Workers' Government slogan is the highest application of the United Front approach, at the level of the struggle for state power. As with other struggles, it cannot be excluded in advance that the working class may enter the struggle not neatly united behind the Marxist party, but, on the contrary, dragging along with it all manner of reformist and bureaucratic elements.

It is true that the 'essence' of reformism is to respect the national state. But in real life, reformism develops not according to the abstract logic of its ideas, but according to the real dialectic of the relation between the bureaucracy and its working class base. Thus Trotsky and Lenin did not argue that only a fully certificated revolutionary party could lead a struggle for state power.

"...We had no desire in the least to suggest that the autocracy may fall only as a result of a properly prepared siege or organised attack. Such a view would be stupid and doctrinaire. On the contrary, it is quite possible, and historically far more probable, that the autocracy will fall under the pressure of one of those spontaneous outbursts or unforeseen political complications which constantly threaten it from all sides." (Lenin, Where to Begin)

"In a previous letter the thought was expressed that under certain historical circumstances the proletariat can conquer even under a left centrist leadership. Many comrades were inclined, I have been informed, to interpret this thought in the sense of minimising the role of the Left Opposition and of mitigating the mistakes and sins of bureaucratic centrism. Needless to say how far I am from such an interpretation..."

"The strategy of the party is an exceedingly important element of the proletarian revolution. But it is by no means the only factor. With an exceptionally favourable relation of forces the proletariat can come to power even under a non Marxist leadership. This was the case for example in the Paris Commune, and, in a period which lies closer to us, in Hungary..." (Trotsky, Writings 1932/3, p. 35)

The Workers' Government slogan was not based on any slurring over the tasks of proletarian revolution.

"The most elementary tasks of a workers' government must consist in arming the proletariat, in disarming the bourgeois counter revolutionary organisations, in introducing control of production, in putting the chief burden of taxation on the shoulders of the rich, and in breaking down the resistance of the counter revolutionary bourgeoisie."

"Such a workers' government is only possible if it arises out of the struggle of the masses, and if it is based on the support of active workers' organisations involving the lowest strata of the oppressed working masses."

"...The Communists can participate in such a government only on the following conditions:-

- (1) ...consent of Comintern;
- (2) That the Communist representatives participating in such a government be under strict control of their party;
- (3) That the said Communist members of the workers' government be in close contact with the revolutionary organisations of the working masses;
- (4) That the CP maintains its own character and complete independence in its agitational work." (Resolution on Tactics of the Communist International, 4th Congress).

"If we conceive of the Workers' Government as a soft cushion, then we are ourselves politically beaten. We would then take our place beside the Social Democrats as a new type of tricksters. On the other hand, if we keep alive the consciousness of the masses that a Workers Government is an empty shell unless it has behind it workers forging their weapons and forming their factory councils to compel it to hold onto the right track.. such a Workers' Government will.. become...a lever for the conquest of power by revolutionary means" (Speech by Radek at the 4th Congress)

In the first place, the Communists would not fail to take advantage of even the slightest vacillation of the reformists to the side of the working class, even at the highest level of the struggle for power. In the second place, while any revolutionary development could only 'arise out of the struggle of the masses', Communists would not ignore the secondary but real role a government based on that struggle could play. The revolution would be fundamentally 'from below', but also partly 'from above'.

Obviously the Workers Government slogan was not merely a tactical, technical detail within the general united front method.

"With the validity of each slogan being determined by its correspondence with the internal logic of the mass movement, the key piece in the programme is precisely the culminating slogan of the whole chain — the slogan for a workers' and farmers' government or for a workers' government. Here again the Fourth International has both revived and enriched the teachings of the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International by using the slogan as a transitional governmental formula corresponding to the organisational conditions and consciousness of the masses at a given moment, and not as a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat" (P Frank, The Transitional Programme).

Revolutionary workers' governments "are not proletarian dictatorships, nor are they historically inevitable transition forms of government towards proletarian dictatorship, but where they are formed may serve as starting points for the struggle for dictatorship" (Theses of the 4th Congress). If the tasks of the workers' government are carried through, if a proletarian state apparatus is built up — i.e. workers' councils, soviets, centralised on a national scale — then we can speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the by far most likely event, the temporary reformist semi allies will openly betray at some point; and then the outcome depends on an open struggle between the Communists and the counter revolution. The short lived experience of the workers' government will nevertheless have had a positive educational importance. 1

In the highly bureaucratised labour movements of the metropolitan capitalist countries at present, the Workers' Government is still not an absolute historical necessity, but it is more than just possible; it is a very probably transitional stage. It is very unlikely that the working class will decisively break en masse with its traditional organisations without an experience of the type of a Workers' Government, or at the least a serious struggle by revolutionaries round the slogan of Workers' Government.

The reader may object: it is just as unlikely that an organisation like the Labour Party will undertake even the first steps towards a Workers' Government. But no. Sections (at least) of the Labour Party and trade union top leadership are quite capable of adopting the most extreme 'left' positions in the hope of maintaining their position in a situation of working class upsurge. In 1917, for example, a National Conference of Labour dominated by the Labour Party leadership issued a call for Soviets. Contrary to what is sometimes believed, the Labour Party was just as corrupt and right wing dominated then as it is now.

But the call for Soviets was a bluff, empty phrasemongering? Certainly — or

at least that is certainly what the Labour tops intended it to be. And how should communists respond? Should we say "Take no notice, it's all pie in the sky"? Or should we say: "Yes, let us build Soviets. We do not trust the Labour leaders, but let us put the question to the test. Let them form a Workers' Government, and we will support them while maintaining our independence".

In suitable circumstances, the call for a Workers' Government is, as Frank puts it, the "key piece" or crowning arch of the transitional programme. Our agitation must at all times "walk on two legs", relating both to the level of the direct action of the working class and to questions of the general administration of society (nationalisations, to take the example given earlier). These two aspects must interlink: the progress of the partial struggles runs up against the basic structure of capitalism and the political preparation round the general political issues helps to forward the partial struggles. But as long as the direct action of the working class remains on a sectional level, and as long as the political scene is dominated by bourgeois political institutions (such as the Labour Party), within a stable bourgeois state, there is a relative separation. In the perspective of a Workers' Government, the two aspects are fused: the working class breaks through the membrane of bourgeois politics.

The Workers' Government slogan evidently has meaning only as a weapon in the hands of a party equipped with a complete transitional programme, and as a concrete step in that programme. It is not our cure all for all the problems of society at any time or place. This was stressed even at the 4th Congress.

"... as an actual political watchword the Workers' Government is the most important only in those countries where the bourgeois society is particularly very unstable and where the balance of power between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie makes the decision on the question of government a practical necessity" (Resolution on tactics, 4th Congress).

"... the watchword of the Workers' Government.. can only be adopted in those countries where the relationships of power render its adoption opportune, where the problem of power, the problem of government, both on the parliamentary and on the extra parliamentary field, has come to the front." (Zinoviev at the 4th Congress).

"It would be absolutely wrong to say that the development of man from ape to People's Commissar must necessarily pass through the phase of a Workers' Government" (Radek at the 4th Congress).

"Woe to us if we ever allow the suggestion to creep up in our propaganda that the workers' government is a necessary step, to be achieved peacefully as a period of semi organic construction which may take the place of civil war etc. If such views exist among us, we must combat them resolutely" (Zinoviev at the 4th Congress).

It is clear with no more said that the common 'orthodox Trotskyist' line on the workers' government in fact turns the communist conception on its head. The communist (and authentic Trotskyist) conception is that the Workers' Government is a bold tactical compromise which we advocate to forward a concrete stage in the struggle. The 'orthodox Trotskyists', by using the Workers' Government as propaganda day in, day out, effectively write a compromise into their programme<sup>1</sup>.

Trotsky commented thus on romancing similar to that involved in proposing 'Workers' Government' or 'Labour to power with a socialist programme' as a slogan for all seasons.

"The revolutionary task consists in demanding that the POB (Belgian Labour Party) take power in order to put its own plan into effect. Vereecken (Belgian Trotskyist) replies to this: No! It is necessary to demand a workers' government and not simply a socialist government. We must not forget the Stalinist workers, and besides, the plan is no good — it threatens us with inflation. I,

Vereecken, I will propose a better plan. Is this serious? No, it is ridiculous. Vereecken sets himself outside of reality. He constructs in his imagination a united front that does not exist in Belgium. For this imaginary united front he proposes an imaginary programme, that is, Vandervelde and Jacquemotte (Belgian Labour and Stalinist leaders) ought to fight together for the perfect plan dreamed up by Vereecken. In this way matters will be splendidly arranged." (Writings 1934/35, p.214)

It is a bitter commentary on the present level of the 'Trotskyist' movement that only the shortest survey of the basic communist conceptions is sufficient to expose the falsity of the policies of all the major groupings.<sup>2</sup>

More than this short survey, however, is required to formulate a positive line for the present period. As Zinoviev said at the 4th Congress "The problem of the workers' government today is not quite clearly formulated. . we must have one or two workers' governments and collect their experience"; and the line of the 4th Congress itself was heavily based on the Bolshevik experience with the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" in 1917. Future articles will examine the concrete types of Workers' Governments, and the historical experience, in more detail.

November 1973

## NOTES

1. The result can be seen clearly in a particularly cretinous case — the League for a Workers' Republic, Irish satellite of the 'Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International'. In 'Workers' Republic', March 1973, the LWR commented on the Irish elections. Readers should remember that the Irish Labour Party was in an electoral and then a governmental coalition with the right wing bourgeois party Fine Gael.

The LWR stated that a correct policy should "demand certain socialist and democratic measures, and demand a workers' government to implement them". "We in the LWR started from this basic desire to get the government out and went on to demand a joint campaign by the trade unions and the Labour Party for a workers' government, a Labour government with socialist policies. We pointed to their successful campaign to keep Proportional Representation as evidence of the feasibility of this". This policy was concretised in the slogans — 'No Coalition', 'Labour Government with socialist policies, supported by the trade unions (!)'

Well, what were the "certain socialist and democratic measures"? We would not necessarily expect precisely the same list as laid down by the 4th Congress of the Communist International for a workers' government — after all, conditions have changed. But unless the LWR has capitulated completely to reformism, unless it really believes there is no qualitative difference between bringing in Proportional Representation and bringing in socialism, we would at least expect to see the arming of the workers in the 'socialist programme'. Here, however, is their programme, from 'Workers' Republic' February 1973.

- Halt unemployment and redundancies now, (how?) and create 80000 more jobs (how?)
- Guarantee a programme of housing and increased social welfare;
- Guarantee a basic minimum wage to all, male and female;
- Remove all restrictions from the trade unions;
- Repeal all repressive and sectarian legislation (to create, no doubt, a state without repressive legislation!)
- Free all political prisoners.

Thus the LWR bowdlerise completely the meaning of socialism.

2. The SLL, the 'Militant', and the ex IS 'Right Opposition' all project 'Labour to Power with a Socialist Programme' — and with different nuances and generally less crudity repeat the LWR's bowdlerisation of socialism.

The 'Chartist' grouping, calling for 'Labour Take The Power', preserve their revolutionary integrity — but at the cost of heavily reducing their contact with reality.

IS's tactic of dreaming up six demands which would seem reasonable to workers but would be impossible for Labour — "reformist in form but transitional in content" — has nothing to do with communist tactics towards reformism. Communists direct demands at reformists as part of a general effort to "base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle", not as a cunning trick. And disillusioned reformists are disillusioned reformists, not revolutionaries.

The IMG's current line of 'General Strike to bring down the Government' has been examined elsewhere in our publications. Of their previous line of 'Workers' Government based on the Trade Unions' little need be said. Either it was fantasy mongering (a call on the trade unions to break from the Labour Party completely, take power, and arm the proletariat) or (more usually in practice) it was based on a bowdlerisation of the concept of Workers' Government.



# On the Transformation problem

geoff hodgson writes —

Phil Semp's useful article on the Permanent Arms Economy theory that appeared in the first issue of 'Permanent Revolution' is unfortunately marred by a number of theoretical errors which I would like to raise here.

## 1. THE ARMS SECTOR AND THE RATE OF PROFIT

Comrade Semp outlines the contention of the economist Bortkiewicz that the conditions of production in the arms and luxury goods sector do not determine the overall general rate of profit. Semp argues that Sweezy and Kidron have made the "biggest mathematical, logical value howler of the lot" (page 27) when they maintain that the organic composition of capital in department 3 plays no direct role in determining the general rate of profit. He states the basic equations of simple reproduction:

$$\begin{aligned} C_1 + V_1 + S_1 &= C_1 + C_2 + C_3 \\ C_2 + V_2 + S_2 &= V_1 + V_2 + V_3 \\ C_3 + V_3 + S_3 &= S_1 + S_2 + S_3 \end{aligned}$$

He then proceeds to show that the values in Department 3 ( $C_3, V_3, S_3$ ) are to some extent determined by the values in the other two departments. He concludes that the general rate of profit is dependent on the conditions of production, including the organic composition of capital, in Department 3.

His argument rests on the assumption that there is no constant capital stock (fixed capital) which is not all used up in production in the system. The amounts of constant capital stock do not enter into the basic equations of simple reproduction, and there is not determinate relationship between these values and the values in the other departments. In the case of expanded reproduction, it is also true that no determinate relationship exists. Constant capital stock, however, does enter into the rate of profit. Marx insisted, time and time again, that the rate of profit is calculated on **total** capital invested. (See *Capital*, volume 3, Moscow 1962 edition, pages 47, 70/6, 111, 149, 152/5, 222 and 224.)

It is relatively easy to 'solve' the transformation problem with the inclusion of constant capital stock, and it can be demonstrated that the values in Department 3, including the constant capital stock, play no direct role in forming the general rate of profit.

This conclusion can be reached by a slightly different route. If Department 3 is divided into two or more sectors then none of the individual values in these sectors are determined by the conditions of production in Departments 1 and 2, via the basic equations of simple reproduction. On both counts Semp's first criticism of Bortkiewicz, is, therefore, unsubstantiated.

The central criticism of Kidron's misuse of the Bortkiewicz thesis is that it tells us nothing of the real development of the conditions of production in departments 1 and 2, which do determine the general rate of profit. Semp is well aware of this point, but he leads us through a great deal of mathematical argument to produce a few criticisms of Bortkiewicz that are either incorrect or irrelevant to the issue at hand.

## 2. THE RATE OF PROFIT — PRICES OR VALUES?

Another serious error is committed when Semp suggests that the general rate of profit should not be expressed as a ratio between prices, but rather in terms of values. (page 29) Later he asserts that "apart from the fact that each capitalist does not carry a slide rule to make sure that he doesn't exceed or fall below the general rate of profit, the overall price of his product being determined by circumstances beyond his control, there is no single rate of profit on account of the fact that under monopoly capitalism the monopoly sectors enjoy considerably higher rates of profit than the non monopoly sectors" (page 30).

At the root of this there seems to be a misunderstanding of the whole process of the formation of the general rate of profit in the economy. Capitalists may not carry slide rules, but **finance** capitalists will take a pretty hard look at dividends and interest rates available before they invest their hard expropriated fortunes.

In a perfectly competitive capitalist system finance capitalists will shift their funds from one firm to another in search of the highest rate of profit on their money capital. The equilibrium situation arises when the rate of profit is equalised for the economy as a whole. The capitalist perceive economic quantities in **price** terms. So the rate of profit that is equalised must be in terms of prices, i.e. profit divided by the price of the total capital invested.

Certainly, in a monopoly situation there are frictional barriers that prevent the formation of a general rate of profit. But different capitals are still competitive and there is still a **tendency** for the rate of profit to be equalised, despite the fact that strict equality is never achieved. This seems to me to be a central difference between a capitalist economy and a post capitalist transitional society, for in the latter there are no finance capitalists and no tendency for a general rate of profit to be formed.

## 3. SOME FINAL POINTS.

I have a number of further criticisms of the article which cannot be dealt with adequately here. A few remarks will have to suffice.

Firstly, Semp seems to attach much faith to Marx's theory of the falling rate of profit. However, there is nothing to suggest that an increase in productivity is always associated with a rise in the organic composition of capital. The latter is a value relationship, in terms of the amount of labour embodied in the means of production. It has been suggested that capital saving innovations are frequent, which reduce the amount of constant capital in **value** terms but raise productivity. Marx's assertion that there is a tendency for the organic composition of capital to rise seems to have no theoretical basis.

Secondly, the assertion that the arms sector is unproductive, according to Marx's criteria, is wrong. (See the article by Ian Gough in *New Left Review* 76.) Private arms companies that produce for sale on the market produce **use values** (despite the fact that these arms may not be used for progressive ends) and they produce **surplus value**. Hence, according to Marx's criteria, they are productive. Semp is wrong to assert that the **whole** of the arms sector is unproductive, and his use of Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labour is of no theoretical import.

It is correct to point out that the arms sector is non reproductive, i.e. arms cannot be used to reproduce either labour power or means of production. For this reason arms act as a drain on resources and they limit the maximum rate of growth in the economy. However they have a **stabilising** effect, the eventual

price of which is economic stagnation. Semp seems to ignore this, stating that arms production is a "barrier to economic recovery". What he forgets is that the intervention of the state sector and arms production has indeed prevented a serious slump on the scale of the 1930s, and will continue to do so as long as these massive expenditures remain. In short he presents no substantial theory to explain the post war boom and the present period of economic stagnation. Attempts to develop such a theory can be found in Mandel's 'Marxist Economic Theory' (especially chapter 14) and 'The Permanent Arms Economy' in 'International' vol. 1 no. 8.

## phil semp replies:

IN REPLY to Comrade GH's notes on my article in PERMANENT REVOLUTION No.1, I should like to make the following comments.

1. Insofar as there is a general rate of profit, this applies to a capitalist production system as a whole. Now, if one splits this up into component firms, departments of production or any other units, it follows that the rate of profit is the sum of the individual profits as a proportion of the sum of the individual capitals advanced.

Thus, if S is the total surplus value produced (and realised), C is the total constant capital employed, V is the total variable capital, then  $p = S/C + V$

Thus, all the constant capital produced must be exchanged, all the equivalent of variable capital (wages goods) must be exchanged, and all the surplus value produced must be exchanged.

Now, all these three departments of production (constant capital goods, wages goods and goods for capitalists' consumption — called by some luxuries) are the component parts of the total social production, considered in this way. It follows that these departments must all be inter-dependent, or, in mathematical terms, functions one of the other. So that any variations in one must be accompanied by corresponding variations in the other two departments in order that exchange can continue. This is elementary for anyone who doesn't think that the parts of a given whole can, when considered as such, be equal to anything but this whole.

Mathematically: in the case considered, total capital produced, c :

$$c = c_1 + c_2 + c_3$$

This must be equivalent to the total constant capital goods produced —

$$c_1 + v_1 + s_1$$

Thus:  $c_1 + c_2 + c_3 = c_1 + v_1 + s_1$

Hence:  $c_3 = v_1 + s_1 - c_2$

And, total wages goods produced must be equal to the value of the variable capital:  $v_1 + v_2 + v_3$

Hence  $c_2 + v_2 + s_2 = v_1 + v_2 + v_3$   
 $v_3 = c_2 + s_2 - v_1$

One doesn't have to be a mathematical genius to see that if either  $c_3$ ,  $v_3$ , or both alter, then  $c_2$ ,  $s_2$ ,  $v_1$ ,  $s_1$ , will change.

Now, when the Bortkiewicz price transformations are effected to produce the same "rate of profit" (i.e. not real rate of profit, but one calculated on the flow of capital, expressed in price terms), then, using a variety of dodges (see PR No.1), an equation is arrived at for this "rate of profit" which does not contain any trace of  $v_3$  or  $c_3$ . It cannot follow, though, that  $v_3/c_3$  (the organic composition of capital on the flow in department 3) is irrelevant in determining

this "rate of profit", given that

$$\frac{v_3}{c_3} = \frac{v_1 + s_1 - c_2}{c_2 + s_2 - v_1}$$

i.e., changes in  $v_3/c_3$  will affect  $v_1$ ,  $s_1$ ,  $c_2$ ,  $s_2$ .

Furthermore, when the Bortkiewicz price transformations are carried out, since the profit in department 3 is a function of  $c_3$ ,  $v_3$  which are functions of department 1 and 2 variables, it's not surprising that the "rate of profit" appertaining to each department and to the whole should be expressible in department 1 and 2 variables only. But only mystics and neo-Ricardians would maintain that the values in department 3 play no direct role in determining the "rate of profit".

The confusion may arise because  $c_3 + v_3 = s_1 + s_2$

It would seem to follow, therefore, that as long as  $c_3 + v_3$  (total capital on the flow) did not alter,  $c_3$  could be increased at the expense of  $v_3$ ,  $c_3/v_3$  (organic composition of capital on the flow) could be increased, and  $s_1$  and  $s_2$  would remain unchanged.

But if either  $c_3$  or  $v_3$  changed, changes in departments 1 and 2 would affect the variable capital employed, and thus the total surplus value produced in those departments. Similarly, if  $v_3$  diminished,  $s_3$  would diminish unless there was a corresponding increase in the rate of exploitation to compensate for that.

If the surplus value relations in departments 1 and 2 did remain unchanged merely because of the mathematically abstracted sum of the total capital flow in department 3 and if all capital created value (a Ricardian fallacy) then  $s_3$  would remain unaltered. Hence, the total surplus value would remain unchanged and accordingly so would the "rate of profit". Then, the organic composition of capital in department 3 would have no direct effect in determining the "rate of profit". This would also apply to the real rate of profit, since we would only have to add on the capital stock to the total on the flow to obtain the total capital involved and hence the rate of profit.

I'm not sure what Cde. GH's third paragraph is getting at in relation to the stock and flow of capital. If he would read my article at all carefully, he might notice that I took great pains to point out that simple reproduction schemas are based on capital flows and don't include capital stock. (p.25 onwards).

On Cde. GH's fourth paragraph — using the Bortkiewicz method I cannot see how the transformation problem can be solved when including the stock of capital unless there are stocks of constant capital in each department proportional to that consumed. Otherwise the value-price transformation can have a different multiplier for each of  $c_1$ ,  $v_1$ ,  $c_2$ ,  $v_2$ ,  $c_3$ ,  $v_3$ ,  $s_1$ ,  $s_2$ ,  $s_3$ . With three equations (four if we include the one showing total value equals total price) and possibly ten unknowns, you would have a job on! That doesn't mean that the transformation could not be effected. But you could only follow it when the values were known.

Similarly, I can't see how you could derive the unknowns using Bortkiewicz on expanded reproduction.

However, whether you can derive the equations or not is irrelevant. All departments are interconnected. The organic composition of capital and hence, at a given rate of exploitation, the total surplus value, are arrived at by considering production as a whole. If you break it down into departments, this operation adds not one iota of value or surplus value; the rate of profit is unaltered overall.

In actual fact, the Bortkiewicz transformations are only applicable to simple reproduction under equilibrium conditions. As pointed out in the article, this is a non-existent capitalism. And, although Marx showed how capitalism can expand, the formulae for expansion in Vol. 2 of 'Capital', and as applied in Vol.3, have none of the necessary dynamic showing the contradictions of capitalism. What they embody are the end result — growth and balance of

departments of production, often after decline in production and after the forcible disjunction of production and consumption; constant capital produced and that demanded, etc.

In this context, the law of value asserts itself, irrespective of the wishes of individual capitalists, and amidst all the fluctuations in prices. In the last analysis, the value relations underlying the real production process are validated **overall** if the products are to be realised, i.e. **total** prices and **total** value must balance (the individual prices can be above or below the value concerned). And they are affirmed also in their negation precisely because violation of the law of value is both product and producer of disequilibrium, disruptions and crises of production.

2. As regards the general rate of profit there are a number of points here.

(a) The equalisation of the rate of profit was, for Marx, a **tendency** under perfectly competitive capitalism (at best an 'approximation' anyway). Given the free flow of capital between sectors, equal amount of capital would **tend** to produce equal amounts of profit. But, here again, if this were a 'normal' condition, the driving force behind capitalist production would be gone. Without the whip of competition spurred on precisely by the unevenness of capitalist production, manifesting itself in lower costs of production for some (therefore profits above the average until the working methods become general) there would be no motor force for growth, for the tendency of the organic composition of capital to increase and, of course, for the attendant contradictions. The rate of profit tended to become general, often after considerable disruption to the productive process as a whole.

(b) Comrade GH's argument for a general rate of profit applying throughout the economy is a little like the protestations of the supposed virgin who is just a "teeny bit" pregnant.

He talks about the equilibrium situation of a general rate of profit in a perfectly competitive capitalist system in which **finance capitalists** are supposed to play some great part in bringing about this situation. Apart from the fact that, when capitalism was most akin to that blissful state of perfect competition, finance capitalists played a relatively minor role, there is no attempt to examine the contradictions of that situation. It is a taken-for-granted state of affairs, i.e. equilibrium is presupposed — a smooth, crisis-free capitalism.

But then we are told: "Certainly, in a monopoly situation, there are frictional barriers that prevent the formation of a general rate of profit." Then the next sentence tells us that there is still a tendency for the rate of profit to be equalised. Now there may be a tendency for a general monopoly rate of profit and a non-monopoly rate. These are not the same and are only approximate. For a discussion of this I refer Comrade GH back to ... Mandel's 'Marxist Economic Theory', chapter 12.

3. This brings us on to whether or not Marxists should be concerned with value relations when calculating rates of profit.

Unfortunately Comrade GH falls into the trap of the crassest empiricism. Because capitalists see everything in price terms and even calculate their profit rates in price terms, that does not mean that we should follow them in understanding the dynamics of capitalist production. It is precisely because values are constantly changing due to (for the capitalist) unforeseen circumstances, that the price form is the best form for regulating the blind forces of capitalist production. However, overall, prices **must** gravitate around values **if** the social product is to be realised. If monopoly prices are above the values, on the whole (although these fluctuations sometimes cancel each other out when monopolies are mutually dependent one on the other), non-monopoly prices must be below.

But, as Marx says in the first chapter of Volume 1:

*"The character of having value, when once impressed upon products, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and reacting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight*

*and action of the producers ... in the midst of all the accidental and ever-fluctuating exchange relations between the products, the labour time socially necessary for their production forcibly asserts itself like an over-riding law of nature. ...*

*The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery, while removing all appearance of mere accidentality from the determination of the magnitude of the values of products, yet in no way alters the mode in which that determination takes place."* (Volume 1, p.75. My emphasis)

*"There is no need to waste words at this point about the fact that if a commodity is sold above or below its value, there is merely another kind of division of surplus value. ... It is not alone the metamorphoses discussed by us in Book II that take place in the process of circulation; they fall in with actual competition, the sale and purchase of commodities, above or below their value, so that the surplus value realised by the individual capitalist depends as much on the sharpness of his business wits as on the direct exploitation of labour."* (Volume 3, p.43. My emphasis)

So that, **overall**, the rate of profit will be reflected via the price form. The individual capitalist may overprice, but for the capitalist class as a whole, the law of value will assert itself. Furthermore, capitalists invest at the given rate of profit at a particular time. For a variety of reasons, not to be dealt with here, the eventual rate (and mass) of profit **actually** realised may differ considerably from this. If this were not the case, it would be very difficult to account for changing profits, capital moving from one sector to another, profits not being realised, etc. Again, the law of value recognises the capitalists even if they don't recognise it.

4. At no time do I assert that an increase in productivity is **always** associated with a rise in the organic composition of capital. It is a general tendency amidst that of the better utilisation of existing capital and the cheapening of elements of constant capital with advances in productivity, which slow down or reverse the trend in certain instances. However, whether in Volume 1 or Volume 3, Marx saw these as, at best, retarding factors, but not such as to offset the increase in the organic composition of capital altogether. Historically, Marx has been proved correct. And this is the trend, overall, in the postwar period.

There are, of course, a number of influences which prevent the increase in the organic composition and the fall in the rate of profit from being so disastrous, at certain periods even more than compensating for the general tendency. I shall deal with these in a future article.

5. I am prepared to concede that certain types of armament do become use values when sold on the market and eventually used. But the armaments I am concerned with are those that are not sold on the market, but stockpiled — nuclear weapons.

In no way can they, I'm glad to say, be considered as use-values. (i) Because the potential social use of most of them, for the capitalist class, does not exist. Most either would not get off the ground or have been made outmoded by further nuclear weapon technology. (ii) A use-value only becomes such if it is actually used. The fact that something produced may have a **potential use** does not make it constitute a use-value, and hence is not a commodity. In the event of nuclear war, only a tiny fraction of existing stockpiled weapons would be used, and in their use they would negate the capitalist system. Some use-values!! Thus, nuclear arms must be seen as both non-productive and a deduction as such from the total surplus value, although the 'spin-off' of weapon research has made a contribution to the realisation and expansion of value and surplus value.

Also, armies and such implements as aircraft, which may be used for strafing guerillas in, say, the Middle East, do not directly contribute, in the immediate economic sense, to the realisation of value. They are costs of keeping certain profits intact, necessary for the capitalist class as a whole, but deductions from the total surplus value produced, although they take the form of taxes, i.e. much

of this is lodged with the workers (in the same way that some of the surplus value the capitalists share with the landlords is lodged with the workers initially).

6. I do not in my article say that arms must be "a barrier to economic recovery" at all times. Nor do I deny the role of arms and other state expenditure in stabilising post-war capitalism. If Comrade GH reads the article, he will see (p.19, footnote 14) that I shall be taking up the offsetting features to economic crisis, and the place of arms and various other state expenditures, in a future article. What I was concerned to establish in my first article was the non-Marxist conception of permanent arms economy as advocated by the I.S. theoreticians.

Unfortunately, Cde. GH appears to have out-Kidroned Kidron. Not only does he uphold the false notion of department 3 production having no direct effect on the rate of profit, but he goes even further by stating, without a shred of historical or contemporary evidence, that Marx is wrong about the tendency to increase of the organic composition of capital. In essence his conceptions are of a non-Marxist, neo-Ricardian type.

*discussion*

## *'Philosophy' and Mr. Slaughter*

WE REPRINT FROM WORKERS PRESS of May 29th 1973 Cliff Slaughter's reply to the article in PR No.1 by Neal Smith entitled 'The dialectics of sectarianism'. (see p.40). We do this firstly because we want to present the debate on what the SLL (now WRP) calls 'philosophy' as fully as possible to readers of PERMANENT REVOLUTION, and secondly because Slaughter's 'reply' is itself a most salutary reminder of the degradation of theory at the hands of the SLL.

The original article was an attempt to get to grips with serious issues that confront Marxists on the nature of the dialectic, the nature of thought, and the relationship between Marxism and politics. Below, NEAL SMITH replies to Slaughter.

I could only welcome the opportunity of serious debate as part of the process of clarification, however harsh the criticism of my own views this might call forth. But sadly — yet only too predictably — Slaughter does not do this. Instead he indulges in vituperative mudslinging, in what must be near to a record low even for Slaughter.

Significantly he finds it difficult to come to terms with my arguments; he accuses me of rejecting materialism... "by sleight of hand"! Whatever that might mean, for Slaughter it serves as an apparent justification for not examining the article as a whole. Instead, he carefully selects single words and isolated short phrases from the context of the general argument in which they are found and in which they gain their meaning. In his reply, Marxist thought — a marvelously sophisticated and powerful system of ideas and experiences — is reduced to the level of a crude club for this ideological neanderthaler to swipe at factional opponents with.

This produces a situation in which a short reply like this must occupy itself mainly with clearing away the rubbish thrown at our heads by Slaughter's article. Such a collection of misrepresentations, slanders and lies, while in

themselves not worth taking seriously, cannot be allowed to go unrefuted.

Slaughter has in fact made something of a speciality of WORKERS FIGHT-bashing, and pamphlets by him are still in circulation containing the foulest slanders about us, such as the barefaced lie that we supported the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland, in 1969 and after: these were put into circulation while we were in the I.S. group, and didn't have the chance of a public reply to them. But we are no longer forced to follow a policy of turning the other cheek to slanderers and those who misrepresent us. However, in this article I shall stick to the misrepresentations contained in Slaughter's reply to my article in PR No.1.

Slaughter begins with a series of bombastic assertions as to the nature of the so-called International Committee of the Fourth International, and of the SLL. This is how it should be, because the starting point for all this shibboleth-monger's politics is the identification of the SLL as the centre of the universe. All definitions derive from the SLL and are relative to it: thus an organisation of dockers, engineering workers, hospital workers and steelworkers and others is magically transformed into "middle class people" the moment it rejects the political and organisational claims of the SLL. And if we insist on pointing out that the much vaunted "theoretical struggle of the ICFI and the SLL" has produced only miles of waste paper then we are sceptics, no doubt gangrenous to boot. If we point out that the so-called ICFI has in the past two years been torn into three inter-warring blocs and that any invocation of it now is an even bigger fraud than in the period between 1963 and 1971, a **fraud hiding essentially nationalist political tendencies within a series of losse international organisational blocs** to which the proud label Fourth International (ICFI, OCRFI, ILRFI) is attached **with no political or organisational justification whatsoever**, why then, we are "empiricists", or maybe even "liquidators"!

Liquidators of delusions — yes!

Slaughter's initial fulminations against WORKERS FIGHT are a collection of what can only be called deliberate lies and lunatic political amalgams in which WF is linked with the ILP and the Fabians. Harsh words, but necessary ones. We are not, by any definition, sociological or political, a middle class tendency. We did not by-pass the SLL, nor did we come from nowhere to "pass" mysteriously through the IS group. As a political tendency we originated in and around the SLL in 1964/65. Far from ignoring the SLL, we have produced the only full analysis of the SLL to appear in the last five years, though in a truncated form with its appendix, which nailed IS's use of the SLL to misrepresent the politics of Trotskyism, removed.

Slaughter alleges that we reject the "over-riding need to build revolutionary parties of the working class". We do not do so, and as Slaughter must be aware, the 'Where we Stand' column in WORKERS FIGHT [now omitted for lack of space. Ed] states that "the task is therefore to build a socialist party which will stand firmly for the interests of the working class". Never have we said anything different, and Slaughter cannot produce a scrap of evidence to show otherwise.

Do we reject "the revolutionary nature of the epoch"? No. We have said and written many times that we fully agree with Trotsky's characterisation of the epoch as one of "wars and revolutions". Of course, we do reject the SLL's analysis of the economic crisis. For our part, we believe that such messianic catastrophism has nothing to do with Marxism and in the last issue of PR, the article by Phil Semp on the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy was a major attempt to go beyond the accepted views among some revolutionary groups as to how capitalism managed to attain a temporary stability and growth after the last World War.

Slaughter's point here is classically sectarian. Instead of recognising that there are differences within the revolutionary Marxist movement and that many of these differences flow — or may flow — from Lacunae within Marxist theory and analysis itself, instead of engaging in debate and polemic to resolve these



issues, the sectarian declares that he alone is the sole possessor of a perfected Marxist truth and that all those who are not members of his sect, who do not share his illusions, are therefore agents, willing or unwilling, of the ruling class.

It is not Workers Fight that is damaging Trotskyism, as Slaughter thinks, but rather the blind dogmatic sectarianism of groups such as the SLL, who have posed for years as the defenders of Trotskyism but have done nothing but degrade it.

However, to turn to the apparently 'serious' part of his reply in which he does attempt to examine the philosophical issues. One of his major contentions is that I am a neo-Kantian; this term is never explained to the readers to WORKERS PRESS, for whom it just adds to the already enormous collection of the SLL's list of derogatives.

How does he show that my article is neo-Kantian...? By quotes? No. By a thorough examination of the trends of my argument? No. He does it simply by asserting two things — one of which is a blatant lie, and the other simply illogical.

Firstly, under the ominous heading "Neo-Kantian", he produces an amalgam of my views and the views of those whom Lenin attacked in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. The technique of slander by amalgamation is one much used by the SLL and consists in juxtaposing two unrelated items and claiming that they are the same because they go together. His argument goes like this: I criticise parts of Lenin's book, Lenin in his book attacked certain people, these people were neo-Kantians, therefore I am a neo-Kantian. This is like arguing that some swans are black, certain lumps of mineral are black, therefore some swans are lumps of mineral.

Of course, it might be too much to expect Slaughter to understand the rudiments of logic, but his allegation contains an even more amazing 'mistake'. This is that those whom Lenin attacked were **not** neo-Kantians anyway. People such as Bogdanov had far more in common with the positivism of Mach than with the transcendentalism of Kant. They did not think that the world was composed of ungraspable "things in themselves", but that there was no reality beyond the surface impression of the senses.

It was in this sense that they denied the reality of the material world; Kant, at least, believed that it was there...

In his frantic search to tar me with the brush of neo-Kantianism, Slaughter forgets both the elementals of logic and also a few basic facts about these philosophers!

His second 'proof' is if anything more absurd, since he says that "significantly" my article "completely omits the great step forward made by Hegel in the theory of knowledge through his critique of Kant." Very strange, this accusation, since on pages 49-50 of PR1 I **do** deal with Hegel's critique of Kant and the Hegelian doctrine of thought and its unity with being, the material world. Yet it is precisely this that Slaughter says that I "omit completely". It isn't dealt with in any great detail, but then it was meant to be an article on the SLL rather than a discussion of Hegel. In no way does my article resemble the neo-Kantianism of philosophers such as the Frankfurt school of Marcuse, Habermas et al., and Slaughter produces not the faintest **evidence** to suggest otherwise.

Alongside the allegation of Kantianism goes that of 'idealism'. This is asserted at some length, but again he has great difficulty in showing it. Perhaps I am, unlike poor Tariq Ali, an exceptionally clever idealist, who spreads his ideas around by 'sleight of hand'. This charge is absurd, as anyone reading my original article can easily see.

There, on page 50, it states that "*thought is not the result of some divine process, but of the processes of nature and society.*" As I see it, that is precisely the difference between the idealism of Hegel and the materialism of Marx. Again no evidence is offered to support Slaughter's allegation other than a few snide remarks about the language in which I write.

'Interaction' is also a word used by Marx and Lenin, but no-one in the SLL accuses them of being idealists. One of the central arguments in my article was that thought is

essentially active, and structures the world at the same time as the world structures it. The active nature of thought was insisted on by Marx — in the Theses on Feuerbach, in his discussion of the fetishisation of commodities in *Capital*, in the German Ideology; by Lenin in his Philosophical notebooks; by Trotsky in *In Defence of Marxism*; and in countless other Marxist writings on philosophy. In this their thinking was many years ahead of current attitudes in psychology, which have just come round to the view that perception, for example, is influenced both by the object being perceived and by the act of perception itself. This lies at the root of the perception of illusions and impossible figures, such as the Muller-Lyer illusion where two lines of the same length appear to be of different lengths. Countless examples of these and other perceptory phenomena can only be explained by the active nature of perception. (For a readable discussion of this see R. Gregory's *THE INTELLIGENT EYE*).

Indeed for Slaughter, thought is a very peculiar process, for he says in his reply that thought's '**only**' interaction is with the material world. This sweeping and nonsensical statement would seem to imply that people only changed their ideas as the result of being hungry, or some other such process, and not also by interacting with other ideas.

This is patently absurd, and yet it is the position that Slaughter must take unless he completely dissolves the distinction that he makes between thought and the world. This distinction, implicit in all his writings and explicit at that particular point in his article, is a distinction which is thoroughly dualist (postulating the existence of an autonomous world of ideas and the spirit **paralleling** the material world) in that he seems to be saying that there is an essential difference between thought and matter. Marxism is not dualist, and the article in *Permanent Revolution* pointed out that "*thought is ... itself, fundamentally, a process of matter.*" The distinction between the two is only an apparent one produced by a religious conception of the world.

The other central issue of my original article, the question of the relationship between Marxism and politics, is not examined at all by Slaughter. In that article I outlined the view that its link with political practice was one of implication, but not one of necessity. In other words, there is always the possibility of a disjunction, at any moment, between a person's political activity and theoretical understanding. (PR, pp.52-53) I argued this concretely in connection with Lenin. All Slaughter has to say about this is that my position is the same as that of Schachtman, yet he has to admit that I say that "*dialectical materialism is not an optional but an essential weapon in the class struggle*", which is precisely the same point that Trotsky makes **against** Schachtman.

Similarly, the idea of the worker unconsciously thinking in a dialectical fashion is used by Trotsky in his polemic against Schachtman.

This idea is one of the cornerstones of my argument that one can think dialectically without necessarily being aware of it. If this idea of Trotsky's is correct then, as my article put it, "*what mystery is there in Lenin, with a vast knowledge of Marxist literature, which he had read critically, materialistically and with a general knowledge of dialectics, being a Marxist methodologically before he made a deep and thorough study of dialectics*"

It is quite clearly expressed that this does not remove the necessity for a study of Philosophy. If this point is understood, then what Slaughter finds 'contradictory' in my article becomes understandable. If politics doesn't **automatically** flow from a theory of knowledge and it is possible and indeed usual that Marxists, like Faust, may harbour contradictory ideas within themselves then, in the light of this, it is perfectly reasonable to say that the USFI (United Secretariat of the Fourth International) tendency has been a healthy tendency in Trotskyism compared to the SLL/OCI tendency (and only when thus compared), for this judgment is based on their **political positions and approach** and not at all on their alleged philosophy.

A theory of knowledge is not a political 'cookbook' from which political recipes for any situation can be extracted — but such is the fate of philosophy at the hands of the SLL. A house built on the shifting sands of a wrong conception of philosophy and knowledge may not be very stable, but it is nevertheless sometimes habitable. It all depends on the architect, and many a slum has been erected on what **appears to be solid rock**, as the SLL amply demonstrate.

In conclusion, I can only repeat that I look forward to a serious debate on these issues and regret the necessity to have to write articles such as this one. In the original 'PR' article I described the SLL as withdrawing from the world like a snail into its shell. The shell is of its own making, and Slaughter's reply adds one more coat to the thickening walls. The title of that article was 'The Dialectics of Sectarianism' — once more this title has been fully confirmed.

NEAL SMITH  
24-7-73

# HOW A CENTRIST 'CORRECTS' MARX AND LENIN

A reply by Cliff Slaughter to an attack on the SLL in the publication 'Permanent Revolution', issued by the group called 'Workers Fight'.

'Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.' These words of Lenin have rightly been the watchword throughout this century of all those who have striven to build the revolutionary parties necessary for the working class to win state power.

One of the difficulties encountered by workers coming towards Marxism is that they see a number of different groups all claiming to be Marxists. It is a very common trick for the enemies of Marxism to mislead such workers by arguing:

'If only they'd stop arguing about theory, everyone would get on with the real business of fighting the class enemy. They all spend too much time attacking each other.'

This is a fundamental mistake. It is not just a set of abstract ideas that is in question, but Marxism as the guide to action of the revolutionary party. Attacks on Marxism, attempts to 'reverse' it (which always means throwing out its revolutionary content while keeping the phrases) represent the pressure of the capitalist class, its politics and philosophical outlook, on the working class and the revolutionary movement.

It follows that these theoretical differences can be settled, not in words, but in the conflict between theory and practice, in which practice is primary. The material content of these theoretical struggles is the proletarian revolution and the whole contradictory development of society and nature which make it necessary.

Only by taking theory back into the work, through practice, thus encountering what is new in the development of matter, can our theory develop.

In recent years the International Socialist group has been the natural meeting-point for middle-class people who want desperately to appear 'revolutionary' but at the same time avoid the responsibility and political struggle posed by the existence of the Socialist Labour League.

One of the tendencies which passed through the IS group in this way publishes a small journal called 'Workers Fight'. They claimed to be Trotskyists working within IS, on the grounds that it was the place where there could be found the greatest number of individuals genuinely seeking to be revolutionaries.

This, in fact, summed up their opposition to Trotskyism: they turned towards a tendency founded entirely on the rejection of Bolshevism, of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International, and of the Fourth International. This tendency calls the USSR 'state capitalist' and rejects the defence of the property relations established in the October Revolution.

The 'Workers Fight' tendency could do this because they started out only from their middle-class rejection of the Socialist Labour League's analysis of the economic crisis, the revolutionary nature of the epoch, and the overriding need to build revolutionary parties of the working class.

Everything written by members of this group is an attempted justification of this position. They are part of a long line of centrists—starting with the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s—who put up determined resistance to the

Fourth International.

Their aim is to cut the British working class off from Marxism and internationalism, restricting it within the confines of middle-class radical control. These centrists are a left cover for the 'Fabian' and trade union bureaucratic control of the British Labour movement.

Because a small group like 'Workers Fight' has this class significance—it is a definite weapon of the class enemy against Trotskyism—we must analyse and answer its material.

One issue of a self-styled 'theoretical' magazine 'Permanent Revolution' has recently appeared from 'Workers Fight', and contains an attack on the Socialist Labour League's positions on philosophy, in the shape of a criticism of the pamphlet 'Lenin on Dialectics', by C. Slaughter, 'The Dialectics of Sectarianism: Philosophy and Mr Slaughter', by Neal Smith.

Life has been made extremely uncomfortable for groups like 'Workers Fight' by the struggle of the SLL and the International Committee of the Fourth International to take the political differences in the Trotskyist movement to the basic level of Marxist method and philosophy.

We have fought to show that the opponents of Marxism who attacked the Fourth International from within had actually abandoned dialectical materialism and capitulated to the philosophical positions of the bourgeoisie.

Trying to take us up on this ground, Smith finds himself openly attacking Marxist philosophy. This leads him into peculiar contradictions.

Readers will recall that we have been attacked by the

American Socialist Workers Party and others (Pierre Frank of the Pabloite 'United Secretariat') for being 'obsessive' about our members learning dialectical materialism.

(Of course the question at stake is not that every party member fully grasps philosophy as the prerequisite for anything else, but the struggle for dialectical materialism as the basis of the training of the party, the development of its leadership and its policies.)

Now in general Neal Smith seems to agree with us:

'Dialectical materialism is not optional but an essential weapon in the struggle of the working class to remake the world.' But does not the word 'optional' in this context ring a bell?

It was George Novack, writing for our opponents of the Socialist Workers Party, who asserted that dialectical materialism was 'optional', and only the programme unites the revolutionary party. ('Intercontinental Press', July 3, 1972.)

But, now, Smith's and 'Workers Fight's' logic must contradict themselves, because the prime necessity is to attack the SLL. Smith writes in the same article that the Pabloite tendency (including of course the SWP), with its anti-Marxist position on philosophy, nonetheless 'has on the whole been a healthy tendency when compared with the dogmatic sectarianism of the SLL/OCL'. But this rejection of materialism is done by a group of people who are not directly 'anti-Marxist' like the SLL/OCL, but who are 'pro-Marxist' like the SLL/OCL.

Wishing to make such contradictory assertions, it is no wonder that Smith needs to attack the theoretical action of the SLL. He also needs to 'forget' to mention that the SLL is the source of all ideas in the public discussion on dialectical materialism, has come out essentially alongside the SWP against the SLL's positions, and has tried to change the world through this practice. Smith soon reveals that he is a conscious opponent of the Marxist method, fought for years of struggle on this question. He criticises Slaughter's pamphlet 'Lenin on Dialectics' for its 'passive and inductive' flow directly from the material knowledge to the object—there is no supposed dynamic interaction.

Continuing the attack, Smith says that the first and greatest question in all philosophy is that of the relation between the mind and the world. This is the question of the 'interaction' of the mind and the world. Smith says that the 'interaction' of the mind and the world is the question of the 'interaction' of the mind and the world. Smith says that the 'interaction' of the mind and the world is the question of the 'interaction' of the mind and the world.

According to Shachtman, 'nobody had ever demonstrated' that revolutionary politics needed 'dialectical materialism' as their foundation. With this 'agnostic' position on philosophy he found it possible to align himself with the avowed pragmatists Burnham, en route to becoming a leading ideologist for imperialism.

Just as Shachtman clung to the argument about some supposed inconsistency on the question of dialectical materialism and politics, in order to move towards some 'American' brand of socialism, so Smith today is seeking justification for a centrist 'British' position in opposition to the SLL and the International Committee. He wants to erase the record of the long theoretical struggle in the Trotskyist movement in order to clear his path.

The real philosophical position of Smith and 'Workers Fight' is an idealist one. This means that they assert some independent reality for the mind, and cannot accept the materialist basis of Marxism. But this rejection of materialism is done by a group of people who are not directly 'anti-Marxist' like the SLL/OCL, but who are 'pro-Marxist' like the SLL/OCL.

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# De Valera: the Authorised Version

*"Judas Iscariot was down at Kingsend  
For the honour of Ireland to hold and  
defend  
He had no veteran soldiers but volunteers  
raw  
Playin' sweet Mauser music for Erin go  
bragh!"*

UNLESS I am mistaken, this is the fifth book on De Valera which has so far appeared, the others being Desmond Ryan's 'Unique Dictator' (1936), Sean O'Faolain's 'Penguin' (1939), M.J.J. McManus (1944) and Mary M. Bromage's 'De Valera and the March of a Nation' (1956). If all these volumes have failed to deal adequately with the subject this is hardly surprising as the success of this man who dominated Irish politics for 40 years was due in no small measure to an ability to disguise the true nature of his policies.

The above-mentioned authors did not penetrate the mask. This latest volume is yet another public relations exercise, indeed the 'authorised' biography, the final portrait, as it were, appearing as its subject prepared for his retirement as President of the so-called Republic of Ireland.

Nevertheless the book raises a number of interesting points which are worth discussing.

It contains a great deal about the 1921 Treaty negotiations, in which the British ruling class, having failed to physically crush the uprising of the Irish people, manoeuvred to split the Irish liberation forces, and succeeded so well that the republican ranks divided in a bloody and inconclusive civil war.

Those who accepted Britain's terms of limited independence within the British Empire — the 'Freestaters' — did Britain's work of butchering their former comrades who held immovably to the goal of a fully independent Ireland: "Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky".

De Valera's stand was typically ambiguous. President of the republic declared during the rising of 1916 and ratified by the vast majority of the Irish people in the general election of 1918, De Valera, the only commandant of insurgents to survive 1916, had enormous influence. He used it, while nominally

things. First, it obscures the primacy of being over its product, thought. Second, it eliminates the conflict between consciousness and its 'other', the material world, which is the only interaction.

These idealists lovingly embrace Lenin's formulation that truth develops by 'an endless approximation of thought to the object', but only in order to give a picture of thought painlessly, gradually developing. For Lenin, the essence of the question was an internal conflict of mutually-exclusive opposites. Concreteness is arrived at, truth is advanced, only in the conflict between theory and practice.

To conceive of 'interaction' (even 'dynamic' interaction) between thought and nature without this conflict is to reject completely dialectical materialism. It means a return to 'the standpoint of the isolated individual in bourgeois society' and his dilemma of 'determinism' and individualism.

At this point our opponent finds himself in deep water. If he attacks the concept of reflection, he must also attack Lenin, whose 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism' was written to defend materialism against 'sophisticated' critics who wanted to capitulate to idealism. And so Smith repeats the charge made so many times by renegades from Marxism: '... in much of his pre-war writing on philosophy, Lenin was mechanical and often tended towards crude materialism'.

The good thing about Smith's article is that he makes clear the idealist thinking behind such attacks. Let us explain briefly: Lenin wrote 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism' against a group of thinkers who used supposedly new scientific concepts to reject the materialist theory of thought as a reflection of matter. These opponents of Marxism, some of them in the Bolshevik Party itself, were in fact reviving theories about some special independent activity of thought and of the social structuring of knowledge. They were bringing back in a disguised form the basic ideas of the 18th century German philosopher Kant.

When Smith now returns to the attack on Lenin's materialism, he affirms his own continuity with these neo-Kantian idealists, who were part of a strong tendency in the bourgeois intelligentsia at the onset

of the imperialist period, with their ideas directed entirely against Marxism and the working-class movement. Those who, like Smith, resurrect these concepts in the workers' movement are once again trying to shape the ideological defences of imperialism.

This brings us to a final and important point on the philosophical aspects of Smith's article. He claims that the SLL is wrong to say that Marx and Engels 'had only to stand Hegel on his head, or rather, on his feet', to arrive at dialectical materialism as a method.

But we are back at Smith's familiar difficulty. If he attacks the SLL on this score, he must also put Marx himself right, for Marx said exactly that! Actually Smith's attack here is derived from the French Stalinist Althusser, now the inspiration of a majority of the Stalinist 'intellectuals' in Britain as well as in France.

Althusser considers that Marxism has been bedevilled and rendered unscientific by reason of Marxists taking literally Marx's remark that he had only to stand Hegel on his feet. His concern is to take the dialectic out of Marxism, to theorize out of existence the unity of theory and practice, and to arrive at something called 'theoretical practice' (i.e. a theorizing which is called practice, but is actually contemplation, comparable and adaptable to the supposed 'scientific' activity of bourgeois sociology. This is essentially a rationalization of the methods of bureaucracy and of the Stalinists' relation to bourgeois order and bourgeois ideology).

Smith's acceptance of this Stalinist revisionism, of course, is intimately related to the political position of the 'Workers Fight' group—centrism which welcomes and adopts every way of attacking revolutionary Marxism.

The dialectical understanding of how consciousness develops through revolutionary practice cannot be grasped without a study of Hegel's 'logic', and of the work of Marx and Lenin on it. Most significant of all is what might appear to be an obscure point.

Smith refers to Kant (we have already seen the connection, known or unknown to Smith, between Kant's basic outlook and Smith's own idealism). But he omits completely the great step forward made by Hegel in the theory of know-

ledge through his critique of Kant.

Once this is exposed, the central foundation (an idealist, Kantian foundation) of Smith's position will collapse.

Kant considered that, however advanced human knowledge became, it could never penetrate to the 'thing in itself', the essence of the objects it tried to understand. The mind worked, according to Kant, with categories which have their own particular reality, a mental reality, and our understanding of the external world could never be separated from these categories imposed by the mind.

Marx, Engels and Lenin in their philosophical writings asserted unconditionally that Hegel had administered the decisive blow against this final idealist defence. He had demonstrated that Kant's 'thing in itself', far from being some irreducible and unattainable material reality, was itself a great abstraction, the product of speculative philosophy.

Secondly, Hegel showed in his 'logic' that our concepts and categories, even the most elementary ones, are not obstacles to real knowledge, but essential steps to it, the path to knowledge.

A quotation from Lenin's 'Philosophical Notebooks' brings these points together, and exposes the philosophical position of those who, like Smith, attack Marx's debt to Hegel. They end up in the mire of idealism:

'Essentially, Hegel is completely right as opposed to Kant. Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract—provided it is correct (NB)... does not get away from the truth [the 'thing in itself'] but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely.'

'From living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice—such is the dialectical path of the cognition of truth, of the cognition of objective reality. Kant disparages knowledge in order to make way for faith: Hegel exalts knowledge, asserting that knowledge of matter, of nature, consoling God, and the philosophical rabble that defends God, to the rubbish heap.' (Lenin Vol. 38, p. 171.)

standing with the hardline Republicans, to advocate merely a different brand of accommodation with the British Empire to the one dictated by Britain and accepted by the Freestaters.

The book deals at length with De Valera's policy of 'External Association' with the British Empire. The narrative makes it clear that this policy was approved by the Cabinet in 1921 before the final negotiations, and that De Valera himself was aware of how much of a compromise it was. The authors observe that "external association was a new concept. All De Valera's influence might be necessary to commend it to uncompromising isolationist republicans. He felt that his influence with Brugha, Stack, Mrs. Clarke and others would be greater if he were not a party to the negotiations." (p.146).

Unfortunately, De Valera's plans were upset by a further act of undisguised capitulation by Messrs. Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, involving not only acceptance of Partition — this was not the main issue — but also the explicit inclusion of Ireland within the British Empire, and an oath of allegiance to the King of England.

Consequently De Valera was left sitting in the middle between out-and-out compromisers and the hardline Republicans. This was, in the short term, a setback, but ultimately it proved a great source of strength for him.

The explanation of this paradox affords a key to the whole of Irish political history since 1921. The virulence of the disagreements over the Treaty was the result of differing class interests, instincts, and drives. For the small farmers and farm workers the Republic meant the completion of agrarian reform by means of breaking up the estates owned by the Ascendancy landlords; for the working class it meant clearing the decks for action against a relatively weak native class of employers (as opposed to the powerful British capitalists with their imperial resources). Consequently in many rural areas the demand for a rejection of the Treaty settlement was upheld, and the

advanced workers (the shortlived Irish CP) also took the Republican side.

De Valera's position, however, was that the negotiators ought to have got a slightly better bargain. He may also have been afraid of the situation getting out of the control of the bourgeoisie: "Whatever the theoretical morality of armed resistance to an Irish government representing an actual or supposed majority, De Valera warned unceasingly that there were people in Ireland who would rather die than acknowledge Britain's King as their king. He feared division in this country, he said, more than he feared England. This was not to argue that the will of a minority, rather than that of a majority, must prevail. It was rather to claim that a majority must show some consideration at least for the conscientious feelings of such a minority. But this, in his view, the pro Treaty majority seemed quite unable or unwilling to realise" (p. 186).

This was the reason for the infamous Collins-De Valera Pact of May 20th 1922, which provided for a national coalition panel of candidates in the elections for the Third Dail. But this too collapsed because of British pressure at the 11th hour. Collins tore up the Pact ultimately and resorted to arms — including borrowed British field guns — to batter down Republican resistance in their Dublin stronghold, the Four Courts, and throughout the country. De Valera issued a call for support for the Republican forces in the ensuing civil war, but by now the issue was out of his hands, however much he might still argue (see p. 216) in favour of 'external association' as a compromise formula. The initiative was firmly in the hands of the military leaders of Republicanism, men like Liam Lynch and Tom Barry.

The IRA leadership soon revealed their own political limitations, however. In the absence of a programme of demands which would serve to rally and hold the small farmers and the working class for a protracted struggle on all fronts against imperialism and its Irish agents, the situation was politically, and became militarily, hopeless. Worse still the workers' leaders also failed miserably. The Labour and Trade Union leaders Johnston, O'Shannon and O'Brien effectively supported the Treaty; the small Irish Communist Party failed to mobilise the workers under the banner of socialism, holding that the struggle for the Republic should come first, though given its

newness, rawness, and tiny forces it could hardly have hoped to decisively affect events. The embryonic soviets set up by striking creamery workers were suppressed by the Republicans. As a result, it became impossible to carry the struggle into the enemy's rear, to transform it into an open class struggle — the only military hope!

De Valera decided it was necessary to bow to the inevitable, and pressed for a cessation of hostilities. The upshot was the famous call to 'dump arms', issued early in 1923.

By this time De Valera was being criticised roundly by both pro Treatyites and hard line Republicans like Mary McSwiney. More than anyone else, however, he now began to see the necessity of regaining the political initiative by constitutional agitation as opposed to the Republican tactic of abstention from the institutions, including the Parliament, of the Free State. Elected Republican deputies refused to take their seats. The Oath of allegiance to the King of England demanded before elected deputies could take their seats in the Free State Dail was the only real obstacle here, and De Valera got round it in 1927 by going through a ritual which appeared to satisfy the requirements of an oath taking ceremony, while he himself stoutly denied that he had taken an oath at all! Thus he parted company with the Republicans — though it took nearly a decade for many Republicans, especially the leaders, to realise how decisive the parting had in fact been.

Not only did De Valera grasp the importance of entering the Free State Dail, but, even more important, he saw the way to utilise the discontent of those sections of the population which had supported the Republicans or had subsequently suffered under Free State rule (e.g. the small farmers and the working class). The most obvious instance of this is the Land Annuities Campaign,<sup>2</sup> when the Fianna Fail took up the agitation began by the left wing of the IRA to cease paying the annual instalments — collected by the government from the small farmers — still 'due' to the landlords who had been bought out on a scheme financed first by the British government and finally in 1923 by the Free State. Various other demagogic ploys of the early days of Fianna Fail are also worth noting, as, for example, such gems as "Republicans recognise no opponents save the Imperialist Party"

(June 14th 1927, quoted by Messrs. Longford and O'Neill, p. 251).

Having obtained power by these means, or at least a majority in the Dail (in 1932), De Valera's next step was to carry the national bourgeois revolution forward as far as it would go without surrendering power to opponents further to the left. This policy was carried out with great skill — although it is fair to say that De Valera was unnecessarily helped by the opponents referred to above.

The British Government in the person of the Labour McDonaldite renegade Jimmy Thomas, which did not entirely trust De Valera but preferred him to anything more extreme (such as the IRA or a Workers' Republic), unintentionally obliged him after 1932 by imposing punitive customs duties on imports from Ireland in retaliation for refusing to continue paying out the annual blood money to the ex landlords. This enabled De Valera to rally the people round a programme of what might be called 'gradualist' republicanism.

The result was that in successive stages De Valera was able to get rid of the Governor General, James McNeill, appointing a Fianna Failer in his place; revise the constitution so as to exclude all references to the King and the Governor General (except as regards foreign affairs, though still keeping membership of the Commonwealth, as the Empire had now been renamed); win back the Southern ports retained as naval bases by Britain; finally settle the land annuity question by a lump payment of £100,000,000, and thus bring the 'Economic war' to a close, in 1938.

Tariffs were retained, with British agreement and no retaliation after the 1938 settlement, on the expanded scale envisaged by Fianna Fail, and a Control of Manufacture Act was passed enabling Irish capitalists to control their own enterprises. The encouragement of tillage helped the small farmers somewhat while low wages for workers were offset by a measure of slum clearance. ("To hell or Kimmage"), Rudimentary welfare benefits were introduced.<sup>3</sup>

All this was little enough, but it sufficed to maintain whole layers of small farmers and workers behind Fianna Fail. Once again the advanced workers failed to seize the leadership of the anti imperialist movement. This was in some measure due to Peadar O'Donnell and his co thinkers in the 1934 left wing split from the IRA, the Republican Congress. The socialist

Republicans led by George Gilmore and O'Donnell concentrated on the issue of the Republic, saying that his disagreement with De Valera stemmed from De Valera's failure to carry out a Republican programme, not from De Valera's opposition to a Workers' Republic. This approach ignored economic and class realities while focusing on the degree of political common ground between Fianna Fail, the IRA and the Congress, to the advantage of none but Fianna Fail and the Irish bourgeoisie. De Valera could produce plausible counter arguments on the issue of the Republic, which was obviously not going to spring into existence overnight.

Agitation and propaganda for a different kind of Republic, which would meet the needs of the men of no property, might not have brought success in the short term, but the long term results would surely have been more favourable. As for the IRA, it made left wing noises from time to time, but never fully abandoned bourgeois radicalism. Having been tolerated and used by Fianna Fail to help beat down the fascist bluish movement called into existence by frightened sections of the ruling class after 1934, the movement was forced to go underground by the mid and late '30s. Its leaders finally embarked on a bombing campaign, which only succeeded in helping British imperialism, and marked the end, for a generation, of the IRA as a force in Irish politics. In the Free State, De Valera, the gradualist Republican, reacting in fear of Britain and continuing the work of the Free Stater renegades of the early 1920s, brought in savage and draconian laws against the Republicans. Military courts were set up with a mandatory death sentence as their only verdict if the victim was declared guilty. Republican prisoners were refused political rights: some lived naked for years in freezing stone cells rather than wear prison clothes. Others died on hunger strike. Judas Iscariot at least had the decency to hang himself. De Valera is now in his tenth decade of life.

The measure of De Valera's 'success' can be seen in the continuance of his policy by his opponents in the coalition Government of the '40s, especially in the repeal of the External Relations Act which led to the declaration of a Republic in 1949.

But De Valera failed to solve all the problems. Partition remained, and the would be self sufficient Irish capitalist



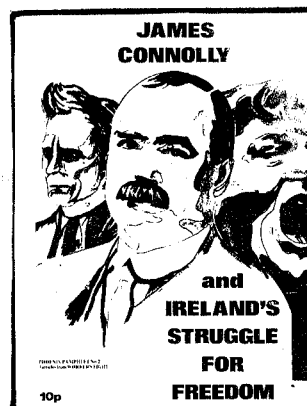
economy which had been built up from 1932 onwards began to get into difficulties<sup>4</sup>.

The result was the Whitaker proposals, the repeal of the Control of Manufactures Act, and a move towards full reintegration with imperialism, which today sees Ireland in the EEC.

Messrs Longford and O'Neill have little to say about all this. Instead they give us portraits of Dev the family man, Dev and Winston Churchill, Dev in international affairs, President Dev, etc, etc. This is windowdressing: a man does not become a national institution in his own right without representing a certain social class, and it is the political outlook of this class which is decisive, and not the personality of its representative, interesting and important though that may be.

This emerges clearly if we examine De Valera's attitude to the Six Counties over the years. His view has been sweet reasonableness itself. As far back as the election campaign of 1918 he declared that "Ulster was entitled to justice and she should have it, but she should not be petted and the interests of the majority sacrificed to please her".

This is the only position consistent with the democratic theory of the nation state, and if politics were a matter of textbook logic, with issues decided by academic courts of appeal, such a point of view would have brought about an end to partition long ago — indeed partition would never have been imposed in the first place.



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De Valera could not afford to challenge imperialism head on over the partition issue. It was too risky. Also it was not imperative. Independent Irish capitalism proved viable on the basis of a 26 county state from 1921 onward; economically viable and, unfortunately, politically viable. That it proved viable in the latter sense was in no small measure due the activity of that man whom Lloyd George described as "not a big man, but a sincere man, a white man, and an agreeable personality".

It is high time that Irish workers stopped allowing themselves to be misgoverned by such "agreeable personalities".

chris gray

1. See D R O'Connor Lysaght, 'The Republic of Ireland', chapter 3: 'The revolution Subverted' — especially p. 68 on the attitude of the CPI.

2. To read Messrs Longford and O'Neill you would think that Peadar O'Donnell never existed and that De Valera invented the whole annuities campaign himself!

3. See also p. 268 on the subject of employment and protection, where De Valera bids for the support of those workers who felt attracted by the protectionism of Griffith as well as Connolly's socialism: in the absence of a Workers' Republic the carrot of employment in a protected industry is inviting. Protection, of course, also appealed to those petty bourgeois who aspired to big bourgeois status.

4. See Lysaght, op. cit., chapter 7: "The New Deal of Sean Lemass".

## Marx's missing link

*The Missing Link in Marx — The First Full English Translation of The Grundrisse. Reviewed by Ken Tarbuck.*

THE PUBLICATION of the Notebooks of Marx dating from 1857-58 is an event of major importance for all English speaking Marxists.

Although this book was never prepared

for publication by Marx or Engels (the latter may not even have known of its existence) it represents a significant development in Marx's economic theories in his mature years. What we have is a series of notebooks, in which Marx reproduces extracts from other writers and his own thoughts on the subjects as they occurred to him. However, we have not merely a collection of notes, but also Marx's workbook for 'Capital' — the results of his years of reading and reflection. If one wants to examine the process of dialectical and historical materialist thinking, in 'the workshop' as it were, then it is set down for us in these pages.

Now, one may ask, why is **The Grundrisse** so important, even allowing for what has been said above? The answer is neither easy nor short. I will attempt to clarify the issues as briefly as possible.

Firstly, **The Grundrisse** is the first work in which nearly all the major conceptual tools which Marx deployed in the writing of **Capital** are first evinced in the forms that are unmistakably 'marxist'. It is here that we see the full development of the labour theory of value, the distinction between necessary labour and surplus labour, necessary labour time and free labour time, value/surplus value; surplus value/profit etc. All these distinctions, disjunctions and unities are elaborated. Take the question of necessary labour time and free labour time. The necessary labour time is that which it takes to 'reproduce' the labourer, i.e. that time in which the labourer reproduces the equivalent of the necessities of life which enable him to go on working. The free labour time is that time which the labourer works and for which he is not paid, but it is more than merely free time appropriated by the capitalist. Free labour time is also the time which frees the capitalist from labour. Thus we see free labour time, given by the labourer, is unfree time for him, but free time for the exploiter, a truly dialectical paradox of unfreedom and freedom arising out of one and the same productive process.

Admittedly, some of the precise terms which have become familiar via the pages of **Capital** are not yet articulated within **The Grundrisse**, but the concepts are.

It is in this book that we find Marx's concept of prices of production, which is necessary for linking values and market prices. Once and for all, the old canard that Marx had to abandon the labour theory of value when drafting Volume 3 of **Capital** and substitute prices of production because of contradictions between market prices and values is laid to rest. It is clear from

**The Grundrisse** that he had worked out his theory of prices of production before writing Volume 1 of **Capital**. It is true that Engels had adequately vindicated Marx on this point when the attacks upon the third volume were mounted, but now the question is conclusively dealt with.

Another major step in Marx's thinking is revealed in these pages with the introduction of constant capital and variable capital as precise categories. This distinction enabled Marx to explain the difference between the exchange value of labour power and its use value and thus pinpoint the origin of surplus value. This was a tremendous step forward from the Ricardian school, and made possible a proper understanding of the origin of surplus value within the productive process, as opposed to the mechanics of circulation.

Because much of the material gathered in this book was not used in the writing of **Capital**, many of the prophetic insights of Marx have remained obscure. For example, he clearly foresaw automation arising not only from the use and development of machinery but from the nature of the inner drives of the capitalist mode of production. Remarkable on the development of large-scale industry and its ever increasing use of labour-saving machinery, he writes: "Labour no longer seems so much to be included in the process of production, but man behaves rather as the supervisor and regulator of the productive process."

I should like to make one further, but crucial, point about this book. I mentioned that the book represented the fruits of the mature Marx's work. In so doing I in no way implied that there was some break between this and the 'young' Marx. It has been fashionable in recent years for one school of Marxists to attempt to impose a false dichotomy between the young — "Hegelian" — Marx and the mature Marx. **The Grundrisse** explodes this myth completely; it demonstrates not only the development of Marx's thinking but also its continuity. Of course there are changes and the discarding of some ideas as new ones are absorbed, but it is not permissible to suggest that there were two Marxes, one the young idealist or humanist, and the other the mature scientific Marx. The book abounds with 'Hegelianisms', and yet it is in reality the first draft (and much more) of **Capital**.

It will not be the young Marx who is put to rest by **The Grundrisse**, but the mechanistic and de-humanised Stalinist 'version' of Marxism.

**The Grundrisse** is not an easy book to

read, nor is one reading sufficient to grasp all or maybe most of the ideas it teems with. The diligent and patient reader will be rewarded by returning to it again and yet again.

k.t.

Translated with a foreword by Martin Nicolaus. Published by Penguin Books.

## The Police and Racism

"Police Power and Black People" — Derek Humphrey & Gus Johns (Panther 40p)  
"Black Britain" — Chris Mullard (Allen & Unwin £1.95)

Derek Humphrey is a white liberal journalist who has specialised in civil liberties, race relations, and immigration reports for the Sunday Times.

What he portrays, on the basis of witnessing hundreds of court cases up and down the country, is the systematic persecution of blacks at the hands of the police.

The cases find their way into Humphrey's books either because individual police "blew the gaff", because the 'wrong' individuals were singled out who could prove the police's testimony to be false, or because police contradicted each other in the witness box.

Most of the police cases are shown by Humphrey to be directed at those living in the areas of black working class concentration, although black students, professionals and even a diplomat were subject to racist abuse and maltreatment at the hands of the police.

There is a reasonable account of police treatment of black pickets in the 1970 Larceny Plastics dispute, and also of the Mangrove 9 case.

Humphrey shows, with statistics to back up his claim, that a large number of cases are brought to court where the person concerned was originally charged with some offence which is subsequently dropped to be replaced by one of assault. For instance, official figures for 1970 allege that 627 Metropolitan officers were injured by assailants. However, the same source shows that 1615 people were convicted of "assault on a constable" without any claim that a cop was actually hurt.

Also there is a useful chapter on the role of the secret police attempting to wipe out

the black power movement in London in the 1970 to 71 period.

Unfortunately, although the book is useful in the details given, there are no lessons drawn. Instead, what is proposed is pussyfooting 'reform' of the police force and legal system.

Gus Johns, a militant black activist, in a supplementary chapter, puts this in perspective. Although not reducing the harassment of blacks to being just a class question, he links their police/legal persecution to that of white workers. He shows that black, especially working class, youth, are consciously hounded. They are doubly oppressed, as workers and as blacks. They are the section most likely to provide a militant response in the future and the ruling class wants to teach them who's boss now.

As such, he contends, quite correctly, that reformist programmes, e.g. for police liaison officers, more black policemen, etc. are worse than useless as solutions to police racism.

Chris Mullard's book is written by a man who was born in Britain, who tried to 'make it' in the middle class career structure. It is largely a personal account of the ensuing lessons driven home. Mullard became one of the many Community Relations Officers of the late '60s and early '70s who had his grant withdrawn for attempting to involve himself in the real problems of racism, as opposed to the Uncle Tom approach of the CRCs.

He shows how the Community Relations Commission, Race Relations Board, and Institute of Race Relations became increasingly embroiled in administering successive Government racist legislation, both in their ideological conceptions and their practical activities. Idealist individuals who were attracted to work for such agencies were gradually squeezed out or expelled.

As with the Humphrey book, Mullard mars his book with proposals for reform of the very institutions and government which prop up and spread racialism. His appeals for these agencies to transform themselves is not compensated for by his last words that, unless they do, "the protests of today will become the riots of tomorrow — there will be war". Mullard himself has a fine record in fighting racialism and its official, 'conciliatory', face. Yet, unfortunately, his book provides no guide as to how to fight racialism.

p.s.



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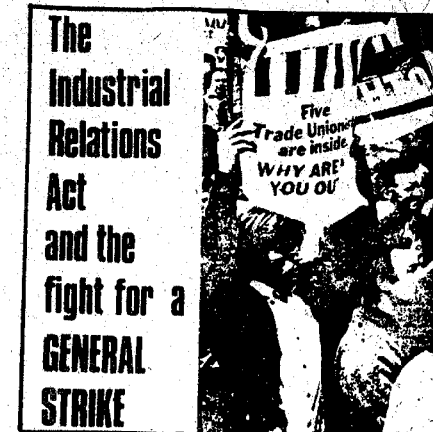
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